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War planning and strategic development in the Royal Navy, 1887-1918

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War Planning and Strategic Development in the Royal Navy, 1887-1918

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the Royal Navy's war planning and strategic evolution from the late Victorian era into the First World War. It demonstrates that a definitive planning trend existed throughout the period which was consistently legitimised by several factors: the study of naval history, manoeuvres, European power politics, procurement, and individual talent. The technological/strategic challenges posed by a perceived Franco-Russian naval threat during the late nineteenth century led to the evolution of a strategy entailing the observational blockade of an enemy's ports and offensive operations between 1888-1905. Based in the Naval Intelligence Department (NID), planning was influenced by the historical revitalisation of Britain's naval past and its application to contemporary technical/strategic dilemmas. As *de facto* planning staff until 1909, the NID modified this dual observational/offensive strategy for war against Wilhelmine Germany. Under Admiral Sir John Fisher, planning aimed at Germany's naval and commercial assets in the Baltic intensified and was utilised as a deterrent to counter aggressive German foreign policy after 1904. Conversely, the Scandinavian neutrality dilemma, 1905-1908, exerted a strong influence on the Admiralty's strategic policy. Responding to the potential closure of the Baltic entrances, Fisher initiated the Admiralty's first "official" war plans in 1907-08. The primary contingencies involved a distant/observational blockade or an offensive Baltic descent which ensured the Navy could still pursue a direct campaign against Germany's economic and naval assets. Despite internal dissension, external probes into Admiralty policy, and increased centralisation in strategic matters after 1908, this dual strategy remained in place into the First World War. During the war, operational realities associated with the North Sea stalemate and German submarine depredations, ironically, rejuvenated offensive designs from the 1904-1908 period alongside the stable economic pressure exerted by the distant blockade until 1918.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments		iii.
Abbreviations		v.
Maps		vii.
Introduction		1
Chapter One	The Naval Intelligence Department, Naval History, and Admiralty War Planning, 1887-1904	6
Chapter Two	Early Planning Against Germany, 1902-1906	49
Chapter Three	The Scandinavian Dimension and War Planning, 1906-1907	88
Chapter Four	War Planning, 1908-1909	126
Chapter Five	Probes into Admiralty Planning, 1908-1909	166
Chapter Six	The Solidification of a Dual Strategy, 1911-1914	192
Chapter Seven	Offensive Planning and Operational Realities, 1914-1918	230
Conclusion		272
Appendices		285

Archival Sources, Government Publications, and Papers	287
Published Sources and Articles	292

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADOD	Assistant Director Operations (Admiralty War Staff, 1911-18)
ADNI	Assistant Director Naval Intelligence Department
<i>BD</i>	G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley (eds.), <i>British Documents on the Origins of the War</i> .
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BS	Battle Squadron
C-in-C	Commander in Chief
Channel	Channel Fleet
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
Commodore (D)	Officer Commanding Destroyer Flotillas
Commodore (S)	Officer Commanding Submarine Flotillas
Commodore (T)	Officer Commanding Torpedo (Boat) Flotillas
COS	Chief of the Admiralty War Staff, 1912-17
DID	Director Intelligence Division (Admiralty War Staff, 1911-18)
DMO	Director of Military Operations (Imperial General Staff)
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
DNC	Director of Naval Construction
DNI	Director of Naval Intelligence
DNM	Director of Naval Mobilisation (Navy War Council, 1909-1911)
DNO	Director of Naval Ordnance
DOD	Director Operations Division (Admiralty War Staff, 1911-18)
<i>FDSF</i>	Arthur J. Marder, <i>From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow</i> , 5 Volumes
<i>FGDN</i>	Arthur J. Marder (ed) <i>Fear God and Dreadnought</i> , 3 Volumes
FIC	Foreign Intelligence Committee, 1885-1887

ABBREVIATIONS cont.

HMS	His/Her Majesty's Ship
HMSO	His/Her Majesty's Stationary Office
Home	Home Fleet
IWM	Imperial War Museum
<i>JRUSI</i>	Journal of the Royal United Service Institution
<i>Naval Staff</i>	Naval Staff Monograph (Historical), <i>The Naval Staff of the Admiralty</i> , 1929, Naval Library Ministry of Defense.
NID	Naval Intelligence Department
NLMD	Naval Library, Ministry of Defense
NMM	National Maritime Museum
NRS	Navy Records Society
PRO	Public Records Office
RM	Royal Marines
RMA	Royal Marine Artillery
RUSI	Royal United Service Institution

INTRODUCTION

Surveys of late Victorian and Edwardian naval policy have examined Britain's rivalry with the Dual Alliance, the revolution in *matériel*, the reforms instituted by Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Fisher, the naval competition with Imperial Germany, and the Service's subsequent performance in the First World War. Few of these studies, however, have considered whether the Navy underwent a strategic transformation during this period of rapid technological change. Many monographs and biographies explore the Admiralty's war planning and staff development within the broader context of the Fisher administration's naval policy but neglect the influence of studies conducted earlier during the late nineteenth century. Little attention has been paid to the Service's strategic preparations from the establishment of the Naval Intelligence Department (NID) in 1887 until Fisher's appointment as First Sea Lord in October 1904.¹ Sources analysing the Royal Navy's operational planning and staff formation throughout 1904-1918 narrowed their focus to specific contingencies without reference to contextual influences nor the entire course of war planning during the period. No study has yet determined if a definitive planning trend existed at all. A belief has thus persisted that the Navy's plans for war were puerile, ill-informed, and based on the whims of senior officers such as Fisher.² A re-interpretation of these sources and the archival evidence, however, presents a different picture altogether. Many assumptions about the Admiralty's strategic abilities overlooked the existence of a legitimate,

¹ An exception is R. E. Mullins, "Sharpening the Trident: The decision of 1889 and the creation of modern sea power", University of London DPhil dissertation, 2000.

² A. J. Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880-1905*, (New York, 1940); op cit., *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904-1919, 5 Volumes*, (London, 1961-1970); R. Mackay, *Fisher of Kilverstone*, (Oxford, 1973); N. Summerton, "The Development of British Military Planning for a War Against Germany, 1904-1914", (University of London: DPhil. Dissertation, 1970); P.K. Kemp (ed), *The Papers of Admiral Sir John Fisher, Volume 2.*, (London, 1965); P.Haggie, "The Royal Navy and War Planning in the Fisher Era" in P.Kennedy (ed), *The War Plans of the Great Powers, 1880-1914*, (Boston, 1989), pp. 118-30; P. Hayes, "Britain, Germany, and the Admiralty's Plans for Attacking German Territory" in L. Freedman (ed), *War, Strategy, and International Politics: Essays in Honour of Sir Michael Howard*, (Oxford, 1992), pp. 95-116; M.S. Partridge, "The Royal Navy and the End of the Close Blockade, 1885-1905: A Revolution in Naval Strategy.", *The Mariner's Mirror*, 75 (May 1989), pp. 119-136.

progressive, and innovative approach to naval planning which effectively met the international challenges confronting Britain at the zenith of its imperial/world power.

This dissertation seeks to redress this gap in the historiography of the Royal Navy's strategic development by examining the Admiralty's war planning from the late 1880's to the end of the First World War. A combined study analysing the origins, nature, and relevance of the Admiralty's planning will address several points: (1) The Service's war planning into the First World War followed a discernable developmental path originating with the NID's work in the late 1880's; (2) Contingency plans developed throughout 1887-1905 to counter a perceived Franco-Russian naval threat formed the basis of later operational plans between 1905 and 1914 for a war against Germany; (3) The Admiralty's strategic planning after 1904 was influenced by prewar European balance of power struggles such as the questions surrounding Scandinavian neutrality and *status quo* in the Baltic, 1905-1909. In order to determine the nature and origins of the Admiralty's operational plans against the Dual Alliance and later Germany, it is necessary to evaluate the means by which various strategic proposals were tested, authenticated, and consider whether these designs accounted for technological advances in naval warfare during the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries (e.g. submarines, torpedo-craft, mines).

An analysis of the Royal Navy's war plans and manoeuvres conducted from 1888 to 1914 reveals that the Admiralty did not view operational planning as an idle pursuit. Indeed, it seriously evaluated the viability of each design with the recognition that a conflict might become unavoidable. The need for more detailed contingencies became more acute in the immediate prewar period when Germany's aggressive foreign policy and naval programme were viewed with increasing trepidation in Great Britain. The few sources which have examined the Navy's war planning against Germany concluded that these plans were dangerously outdated and produced solely to buttress

Fisher's reform policy from further attacks by his opponents.³ Strong evidence that the Navy's 1887-1914 planning was neither amateurish nor formulated on ulterior political/personal agendas does exist. This includes: similarities between the Admiralty's strategic preparations for a war with the Dual Alliance and later plans against Germany; the Navy's traditional role as an "offensive" deterrent to the rise of any hegemonic European power or bloc; the inter-relationship between war plans, Fleet manoeuvres/exercises, and Foreign Office diplomacy; the Admiralty's vessel procurement policies; and the role played by a select coterie of talented officers within the NID. The Admiralty's war planning was, in fact, the product of a carefully constructed process, developed over time by some of the sharpest minds in the Service. Fisher's political problems aside, the ultimate aim of the Admiralty's plans was to provide the most effective method of employing the Royal Navy's traditional naval preponderance against any adversary intent on threatening British and imperial security.

An important factor in the development of prewar Admiralty strategic planning, which has been largely ignored, was the role played by the academic study of British naval history throughout the 1880's-1890's, coupled with the formation and expansion of the NID as the Service's *de facto* staff system. British naval historians such as Sir John Knox Laughton and Vice-Admiral Philip Colomb, along with intellectual forums such as the Royal United Service Institution (RUSI) and the Navy Records Society (NRS), applied the lessons of the past to contemporary strategic, tactical, and technological issues. This movement's effect on the more erudite officers associated with the NID and war planning was far-reaching. All of the Directors of Naval Intelligence (DNI) in the 1887-1905 period were either former pupils of Laughton at the Royal Naval College or colleagues of the historian prior to and after his formation of the NRS in 1893. After 1905, Laughton's protege, Sir Julian Corbett, became involved

³ Kemp, *Fisher Papers* v.2. , pp. 316-7; Summerton, "British Military Planning", Chapter 5; Haggie, "War Planning", pp. 120, 124-5, 129-30; Hayes, "Admiralty's Plans", pp. 95-116; N. d'Ombrain, *War Machinery and High Policy: Defence Administration in Peacetime Britain, 1902-1914*, (Oxford, 1973), p. 157; Nicholas A. Lambert, *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution*, (Columbia, 1999), pp. 179-82.

with the Admiralty's war planning through his work at the Naval War Course and his employment as the Fisher regime's historical "propagandist".

Since the Admiralty's prewar planning was centred exclusively in the NID until its demise as a "staff" in 1909, it is necessary to briefly examine key planners as well as the issue of a naval staff system. The DNI's, their staffs at NID, officers associated with the Naval War College/Course, and others influenced the Service's strategic progression throughout the 1887-1909 period. The NID's early studies led to the development and adoption of an offensive "observational" blockade strategy, along with direct assaults against an enemy's bases and vital points, as a counter to the French *Jeune Ecole* doctrine in the late 1880's-1890's--a strategy later adopted for a possible war against Germany. After 1897, the majority of these offensive contingencies and the evolution of the distant blockade strategy were the products of the NID's unofficial planning sections and one officer in particular, Admiral George Ballard. Loosely affiliated with the historical revitalisation of the Service begun by Laughton, Colomb, and DNI's such as Admirals Sir Cyprian Bridge and Reginald Custance, Ballard's contribution to Admiralty planning was made possible through the precedent set by that movement. The formation, organisation, and duties of the NID are also considered, as they had a direct bearing on the formulation of the Navy's strategic designs throughout the period. The department's demise as the Service's *de facto* naval staff and questions surrounding the creation of other "staff" bodies under Fisher are also addressed as these issues affected the nature and contents of planning conducted well past the outbreak of the war in 1914.

During the First World War, the Royal Navy's operational realities differed substantially from earlier plans for forays against the German North Sea littoral and in the Baltic to contain or destroy the High Seas Fleet and Germany's extensive overseas commerce. Nevertheless, several of the earlier provisions were rehabilitated and reconsidered during the conflict. Accordingly, an assessment of certain wartime contingencies is necessary to evaluate to what extent prewar offensive plans were duplicated. In particular, Fisher's and Churchill's promotion of inshore and amphibious

operations along Germany's North Sea coast and in the Baltic during 1914-15 share an affinity with designs formulated throughout 1902-09, if not earlier. Other operations considered at the height of Germany's unrestricted submarine campaign in 1917, such as blocking the German North Sea estuaries, mine blockading their entrances, and seizing Heligoland, originated within NID in 1904-07--themselves byproducts of studies carried out in the late 1880's-1890's. A comparative appraisal of the Navy's wartime proposals with their prewar counterparts reveals that a definitive trend in offensive planning persisted well into the First World War. It also proves that the designs created between 1887 and 1914 were legitimate and not mere "foils" to assuage opposition to Admiralty policy. These earlier offensive proposals were not adopted during the war due to the technological realities posed by submarines, mines, and torpedo craft in the North Sea. Six months into the conflict, the operational dictates imposed by these weapons caused the onset of a defensive mentality throughout the ranks of senior flag officers within the Grand Fleet and Admiralty. Ironically, however, aspects of the planning begun in the 1890's held on, fuelled by the very technological factors that had purportedly made prewar observational blockade/inshore designs obsolete. Although these plans were never implemented, for thirty years the Admiralty's strategic preparations remained coherent, professional, and attuned to the efficient projection of the Royal Navy's power to settle any conflict which threatened the security of the British Empire.

Chapter One: The Naval Intelligence Department, Naval History, and Admiralty War Planning, 1887-1904.

I.

The late Victorian Navy has been portrayed as a collection of colonial gunboats and freakish ironclads, commanded by “spit and polish” officers possessing little intellectual acuity beyond their own narrow technical training. Fortunately, this “grotesque parody”¹ has been challenged by studies highlighting the intellectual, strategic, and technological accomplishments carried out before Admiral Sir John Fisher’s “modernisation” of the Royal Navy after October 1904.² While conservatism and a squashing of command initiative were retrenched following the *Victoria* disaster in June 1893,³ two factors emerged to enhance the Service’s strategical progression: the establishment of the Naval Intelligence Department (NID) in 1887, and the rise of a “scientifically” based study of the Navy’s past led by Sir John Knox Laughton, John and Philip Colomb, and “intellectual” officers such as Cyprian Bridge, Reginald Custance, and Prince Louis Battenberg. Created to facilitate mobilisation, the NID remained the Navy’s *de facto* planning staff through its links with history, officer education, and mandate to craft manoeuvres based on existing strategic realities until 1909.⁴ The NID’s

¹ A. Lambert, *The Foundations of Naval History: John Knox Laughton, the Royal Navy and the Historical Profession*, (London, 1998), p.12.

² *Ibid.*; D. Schurman, *The Education of a Navy: The Development of British Naval Strategic Thought, 1867-1914*, (London, 1965); M. Allen, “The Foreign Intelligence Committee and the Origins of the Naval Intelligence Department of the Admiralty”, *Mariner’s Mirror*, Volume 81., No. 1. (February 1995), pp. 65-78; A. Preston, “The End of the Victorian Navy”, *Mariner’s Mirror*, Volume 60. (November 1974), pp. 363-81; N.A.M. Rodger, “British Naval Thought and Naval Policy, 1820-1890: Strategic Thought in an Era of Technological Change” in C. L. Symonds (ed), *New Aspects of Naval History: Selected Papers Presented at the Fourth Naval History Symposium, United States Naval Academy, 25-26 October 1979*, (Shrewsbury, 1980), pp. 140-52.

³ A. Gordon, *The Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Policy*, (Annapolis, 1996), Chapters 10-15.

⁴ This is the dominant theme throughout the Admiralty’s internal historical appreciation of the Naval Staff. Naval Staff Monograph (Historical), *The Naval Staff of the Admiralty. Its Work and Development. (Naval Staff)*, Naval Staff, Training and Staff Duties Division, September 1929, BR 1875, Naval Library, Ministry of Defence, (NLMD).

inter-relationship with the historical movement created by Laughton and Philip Colomb influenced a planning trend that continued into the First World War. By the late 1890's, junior officers such as George Ballard were applying axioms drawn from this intermeshing of history, tactics, strategy, and technology to a re-interpretation of the Service's traditional close blockade strategy.

Since the seminal study of the late Victorian-early Edwardian Navy paid scant attention to the relationships between the NID, war planning, scholarly naval history, and a procurement policy aimed at inshore operations, an accurate depiction of the Service's strategic policy during this period remains incomplete.⁵ A belief that the Admiralty abandoned the traditional close blockade strategy due to the realities created by steam, torpedo-craft, and the submarine, has persisted.⁶ A re-consideration of the evidence reveals that the case against the close blockade after 1888 is not that definitive. Reflected in manoeuvres after 1887, the strategic, tactical, and technological problems of maintaining a blockade were consistently appraised and modified to meet a projected naval war against France and, after 1892, the Dual Alliance. What emerged after 1888 was a variation on the traditional strategy, involving the "observational" blockade of an enemy's main bases through the establishment of advanced flotilla bases. This fulfilled the Admiralty's primary objectives: defeating the enemy's main fleets, preventing invasion, and protecting Britain's seaborne commerce. Manoeuvres and procurement were an extension of the Admiralty's strategic preparations and the perceived threat to overseas trade posed by the *Jeune Ecole*. Solidifying Britain's naval supremacy, the Naval Defence Act and Spencer Programmes of 1889 and 1894 included torpedo-gunboats and their derivative, the destroyer, to counter the torpedo-craft of France's *défenses mobiles* and facilitate the Admiralty's principal offensive strategy: an observational blockade on French bases. Not all the 1888-1904 exercises dealt with

⁵ Marder, *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era, 1880-1905*, (New York, 1940).

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-12, 367-70; M.S. Partridge, "The Royal Navy and the End of the Close Blockade, 1885-1905: A Revolution in Naval Strategy?", *Mariner's Mirror*, Volume 73., No. 2. (May 1989), pp. 119-36.

blockade, but related aspects associated with the torpedo-boat question remained a prominent component. Enhancing the Fleet's anti-torpedo counter measures, manoeuvres were inversely applicable to conditions simulating inshore operations off the French coasts. The relationship between naval history, the NID's early war plans, manoeuvres, and procurement proved the foundation for a definitive offensive planning trend continuing past Fisher's alleged "reform" of the Service after 1904.

II.

The creation of the NID and its predecessor, the Foreign Intelligence Committee (FIC, 1882-87), reflected the Admiralty's realisation that the increasingly complex strategic environment in the late 1870's required enhanced systematic planning and new solutions. By 1880, the need for up-to-date intelligence increased with the prospect of a possible naval war with either France or Russia and the protection of Britain's expansive overseas commerce.⁷ The Fleet's slow trial mobilisation during the 1885 Russian War Scare, coupled with the navalist furor generated by W.T. Stead's 1884 "The Truth About the Navy" articles, increased public agitation for the reformation of the Navy's readiness for war, especially its mobilisation and planning arrangements.⁸ The FIC's expansion was sparked by agitation from Captain Lord Charles Beresford, Junior Naval Lord in the new Admiralty administration established under the First Lord, Lord George Hamilton (1886-1892) and Senior Naval Lord, Admiral Arthur W. A. Hood (1886-1889) in August 1886. Based on a 1st October memorandum by Beresford and reports by the head of the FIC, Captain W. Hall, during the 1885 War Scare, Hood concluded the department required enlargement.⁹

⁷ J.C.R. Colomb, "Naval Intelligence and Protection of Commerce in War", *JRUSI*, (1881), pp.553-78; B. Ranft, "The Protection of British Seaborne Trade and the Development of Systematic Planning for War, 1860-1906" in B. Ranft (ed), *Technical Change and British Naval Policy, 1860-1939*, (London, 1977), p. 1; See: Allen, "Origins", p. 65-71.

⁸ *Anatomy*, pp. 120-3; Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 179-184; A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918*, (Oxford, 1988), pp. 298-301.

⁹ Beresford to Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Phipps Hornby, August 24, 27, 1886, Hornsby MSS, PHI/120(B), NMM.; Memorandum by Lord Charles Beresford, "War Organisation", October 1, 1886, ADM 116/3106, Formation of Naval Intelligence Department. Reorganisation of Foreign

Despite resistance from within the Board, Hood pushed a proposal to establish an intelligence department at the end of October.¹⁰ Hall's assistant at the FIC, Captain Reginald Custance, was designated to prepare a mobilisation scheme with input from foreign station C-in-C's on their intended actions in the event of war. A new Director of Naval Intelligence (DNI) would complete a similar design for home waters and prepare plans for potential campaigns in the Baltic, an attack on Cherbourg, and trade protection in the Western Approaches.¹¹ Appointed to the FIC in October 1888, Custance played a prominent role not only in the new department's formation but later as DNI,¹² and was a member of an officer coterie associated with the intellectual revitalisation of British naval history. An interim report by Hall stressed that naval strategy form a chief function in the new body. Strategic/war planning was included amongst its duties, but only under the Board's direction. The DNI's initiative in strategic planning was limited to an advisory status and was wholly contingent on the Senior Naval Lord's dictates.¹³ Restricting the DNI's strategic prerogative, Hall's recommendations hamstrung the new department's development into a full-fledged naval planning staff.¹⁴

As constituted in January 1887, the NID included Hall as DNI with two Assistant DNI's (ADNI), Captains Eadley Wilmont and Custance (ADNI's, 1887-1890) respectively, heading the Intelligence (Section I) and Mobilisation (Section II) Divisions.

Intelligence Committee, 1886-1888. Case 0074; Lord Charles Beresford, *The Memoirs of Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, Volume 2*, (London, 1914), p. 344-9; Minutes by Hood, September 27, October 2; Minute by Hamilton, October 11, 1886, ADM 1/6820 (a), Admiralty, October 1886; Allen, "Origins", p. 72-5.

¹⁰ Minutes by Vice-Admirals Hoskins and Graham, October 26-27, 1886, ADM 116/3106.

¹¹ Minute by Senior Naval Lord, October 28, 1886, ADM 116/3106.

¹² *Naval Staff*, Appendix B, p. 120; Matthew Allen, "Rear Admiral Reginald Custance: Director of Naval Intelligence", *Mariner's Mirror*, Vol. 78. No. 1 (February 1992), pp. 61-75.

¹³ Preliminary report on a Naval Intelligence Department, November 4, 1886, ADM 1/6820(a); Instructions for Director of Naval Intelligence, Proposals by Captain W. Hall and final version, January 1887, ADM 1/6868 (a); Appendix II. Instructions for the DNI, Report on the Work of the Department During the Year 1887, NID Report No. 155., February 1888, ADM 231/12.

¹⁴ Allen, "Origins", pp. 73, 75.

The department's "purely advisory" status entailed "Preparation for War" under the supervision of the Senior Naval Lord and his staff, Military ("M" Branch), and the dissemination of information required by the other Naval Lords. Its primary duties entailed: collection, analysis, and recording of all information related to "maritime matters" for the Board's perusal in the event of war; preparation of "complete" mobilisation plan for the rapid deployment of the Empire's naval forces; and all points affecting "Preparation for War" without dictating policies regarding construction, armaments, etc., unless asked by the Board. Intelligence on foreign warships, fast foreign and British mercantile steamers, foreign naval personnel, European coastal defences, and the state of British coaling station defences would be made "immediately" available to the Board.¹⁵

Although the NID's duties included war planning, "when directed", it was a significant omission that a separate division was not established to plan operations and consider strategical issues. Prerogative in operational planning remained centred in the Senior Naval Lord.¹⁶ A case for broader staff work could not be made when Service chiefs such as Hood and his predecessor, Admiral Sir Astley Cooper-Key (1879-1885), regarded strategic conceptions as their exclusive preserve.¹⁷ This situation permeated the NID's existence and worsened under Fisher's overlordship in 1904-09.

A "fruit" of the new organisation was its responsibility for the creation, institution, and evaluation of naval manoeuvres initiated after the Jubilee Review in July 1887. Manoeuvres called attention to contemporary strategical/tactical questions,¹⁸ but were a poor substitute for a proper planning section and the DNI's executive

¹⁵ Report on the Work of the Department During the Year 1887, NID Report No. 155. Appendix I. Office Memorandum. Intelligence Department., Appendix II. Instructions for the DNI, January 24, 1887, ADM 231/12, NID Reports, 1887-1889.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, Appendices I and II.

¹⁷ Allen, "Origins", p. 75; P. Colomb, *Memoirs of Sir Astley Cooper Key*, (London, 1898), p. 491; N.A.M. Rodger, "The Dark Ages of the Victorian Navy", *Mariner's Mirror*, No. 62. (1976), pp. 123-6; Schurman, *Education*, p 103.

¹⁸ See: *Naval Staff*, p. 38-42; Naval Manoeuvres 1887, NID Report No. 137, ADM 231/11.

representation on the Board. Its advisory status meant that the NID's work on manoeuvres became the only real outlet for the consideration of strategic issues and the construction of "war plans". A full scale expansion did not occur until Custance's term as DNI (March 1899- November 1902) when, through his direction and the work of Captain (later Admiral of the Fleet) Prince Louis of Battenberg (ADNI 1899-1900), two Assistant DNI's were added and the department was reorganised into four separate divisions: Mobilisation, War (Defence), Foreign (Intelligence), and Trade. A fifth, Coastal Defence, division was added in 1905.¹⁹ Significantly, the War/Defence Division was added in 1900 to serve as the Service's *de facto* planning staff handling all questions of strategical policy, Fleet War Orders (plans), and manoeuvre reports. When Battenberg became DNI in November 1902 the NID, already regarded "as a staff in itself", had reached the "zenith of its career".²⁰

Apart from organisational restrictions placed on the new department, fiscal constraints and a dearth of personnel restricted its maturation as a "staff"-type organisation. The Treasury refused to endorse the Admiralty's request for additional funding to pay for the new department. The dispute revolved around provisional salaries for the new staff which were higher than the Treasury would accept. After consulting Hamilton and his predecessors in office, W. H. Smith, and George Goschen, Prime Minister Salisbury backed the First Lord's decision to assign a lower pay scale to the NID.²¹ The entire episode indicated the Admiralty's casual approach to the intelligence/strategy issue and the low priority assigned to the new department. Accepting the need for the organisation, the Board was unwilling to give the NID the support it needed to become a fully effective "staff" organisation.

A shoestring budget and minuscule staff translated into decreased effectiveness

¹⁹ See: Appendix I.

²⁰ *Naval Staff*, pp. 41-2; Custance to Bridge, March 6, 1901, Bridge MSS, BRI/15, NMM; "Naval Intelligence Department. Distribution of Work.-March 1905", NID Report No. 789. Volume 45, ADM 231/45; Kerr, *Battenberg*, pp. 161-3, 165.

²¹ Allen, "Origins", pp. 74-5.

in dealing with strategic questions and operational planning, despite the best efforts of the DNI's and their staff.²² The department could not provide accurate information regarding the French Fleet's mobilisation at Toulon during the naval "scare" in January-February 1888. The Admiralty had to rely on Foreign Office contacts with the Italian and German governments for intelligence on French naval activity throughout the crisis.²³ Unlike Hall, the next DNI, Captain (later Admiral Sir) Cyprian A. Bridge (1888-1894), found the restrictions on the department frustrating. One of the Service's more capable intellectuals, Bridge advocated a staff and a proper naval college as early as 1870. A keen student of strategy, tactics, and history he would, along with his friends Custance and John Laughton, play a significant role in the development of the scholarly study of Britain's naval past and strategic "doctrine" throughout the 1890's--much of this work occurring during his tenure as DNI.²⁴ What little time the NID actually spent on strategic matters was subsumed by other, usually mundane, tasks. Bridge complained to Custance in December 1891:

Even in your time you must have noticed how more and more impossible it was becoming for the D.N.I. himself to keep conversant with the minute details of the Foreign Intelligence coming into that Department. The case is stronger now than ever....The special subjects referred to the D.N.I. to be dealt with by him personally continue to increase in both number and importance; and occupy even more than the hours of the usual official day. I could say to you what it would not do to say to every-one; and that is, that the D.N.I. can only manage to get through even a perfunctory examination of the papers and subjects referred to him by coming earlier and staying later than anyone else at the Admiralty and by taking work home with him.²⁵

Despite under-funding, overwork, and the purely technical nature of foreign

²² *Naval Staff*, Appendix B, p. 120; "Instructions for the DNI", January 1887, Appendix II., NID Report No. 155, February 1888, ADM 231/12.

²³ *Anatomy*, pp. 126-8.

²⁴ C.A.G. Bridge, "On the Necessity of forming a Naval Staff", *Naval Science*, (London, 1870); A. Lambert, *Foundations*, pp. 11-2, 20, 32, 37, 41-3, 101, 103, 110, 113, 119, 138, 142-4, 162 (and footnote #101), 185.

²⁵ Bridge to Custance, December 7, 1891, Bridge MSS, BRI/18, Part 4. (Bridge to Custance 1890-1894), NMM.

intelligence, strategic issues were being considered by the NID. In April 1892, Bridge alluded to Custance's role in ensuring that strategy and planning remained a vital component of the department's functions: "In our own service the unfortunate extent to which mere drillists and specialists have had their way-to the complete expulsion of all strategical and tactical interest till you and others got a chance of showing what could be learned from manoeuvres is to be attributed to a full, if not redundant, peace establishment."²⁶ Indicating the role of manoeuvres/exercises to teach strategic/tactical lessons, Bridge identified the other major hurdle restricting the department as an operational planning body—a profusion of technically trained “drillists and specialists” within the officer establishment.

By the early 1880's, technology, science, and discipline dominated the junior officer education from their rudimentary initial instruction in HMS *Britannia* to later study at the Royal Naval College and specialised branch training (i.e. Gunnery, Torpedo). Throughout the 1860's-early 1870's, naval, technical, and practical sciences governed the curriculum of the “naval university” at Portsmouth and later Greenwich.²⁷ In 1877, Bridge condemned the Navy's educational process and the over-reliance on mathematics which produced “exam” lieutenants who were useless at sea.²⁸ As such, the Navy's educational structure was detrimental to the successful meshing of “theoretical” and “practical” training and antithetical to the “brainy” work associated with the NID.²⁹ The naval past was viewed by many officers to be irrelevant in the modern steam age. History

²⁶ Bridge to Custance, April 11, 1892, *Ibid.*; Custance to Bridge, July 18, 1903, BRI/18, Part 3.

²⁷ See: Lambert, *Foundations*, pp. 22-3, 31-2, 34-8; H.W. Dickinson, “Educational Provision for Officers of the Royal Navy, 1857-1877”, (unpublished University of London, Ph D thesis, 1994).

²⁸ Lambert, p. 37.

²⁹ Lambert, p. 192; J.R. Thursfield, “The Training and Supply of Officers” (September 13, 1894 and October 20, 1894) in Sir George S. Clarke and James R. Thursfield, *The Navy and the Nation*, (London, 1897), pp. 243-68.

merely offered the continuity of tradition and patriotic inspiration.³⁰ This environment quashed the very processes which could improve the officer cadre's higher training, overcome their inexperience with actual combat, and clarify the application of new technology.³¹ In the 1870's, views on history's role in the Service began to change, led from within by intellectuals such as John Knox Laughton and Philip Colomb.³² Linked to "progressive" DNI's such as Bridge, Custance, and Battenberg, Laughton's 'scientific' study of naval history provided a more rounded educational system by the 1880's and laid the foundation for the development of strategic "doctrine" within the Navy under Julian Corbett and others.³³

III.

John Laughton and the Colomb brothers had a lasting impact on scholarly British naval history, officer education, and the Service's strategic development in the 1880's-90's.³⁴ The seminal study of the late Victorian/early Edwardian Navy, however, overlooked the methods through which Laughton and the Colombs influenced a strategic planning system which remained in place, arguably, into the First World War.³⁵

As a shipboard Naval Instructor (1853-1866), lecturer/instructor at the Royal Naval College at Portsmouth (1866-1873), and head of the Meteorology and Marine Surveying department when the College moved to Greenwich (1873-1885), Laughton developed an interest in history in the 1860's. By the 1870's, he argued that lessons from a "scientific" study of naval history could be applied to contemporary naval education

³⁰ Schurman, *Education*, pp. 3-5.

³¹ Rodger, "British Naval Thought", pp. 140-1, 145-9; Gordon, *Rules of the Game*, pp. 155-91.

³² A. Lambert, pp. 21-40.

³³ *Ibid*, pp. 39-41, 44-5, 47-8, 50, 162-3, 232, 190, 220-23; Schurman, *Education*, pp. 10-14.

³⁴ For Laughton's achievement and the Colomb's influence, see: Lambert, *Foundations*, passim; Schurman, *Education*, Chapters 1-3, and 5.

³⁵ See: Lambert, pp. 143, 193, 229; Schurman, *Education*, p. 36, footnote #2; Gordon, *Rules*, p. 186.

and policies, including tactical and strategic principles. Presented in a June 1874 Royal United Service Institution (RUSI) paper, “The Scientific Study of Naval History” and reiterated in 1875, Laughton lobbied to include naval history in officer education at Greenwich. His arguments impressed the Naval College President, Admiral Sir Astley Cooper Key (1873-6), a naval history course was added to the College curriculum with Laughton beginning lectures in 1876.³⁶ As First Naval Lord (1879-1885), Key helped Laughton gain access to the Admiralty records repositied in the Public Record Office in 1879. Setting the precedent, Laughton obtained wider scholarly access to the documents by 1886: “This was critical, enabling naval history to move into the academic mainstream, and this, in turn, ensured that it could meet the Navy’s needs.”³⁷

Through his role as a lecturer at the Naval College, Professor of Modern History at King’s College (1885-1914), his extensive archival experience, and a strict adherence to “quality control” in his historical writings and reviews in the *Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)*, *The Edinburgh Review*, the *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution (JRUSI)*, and other periodicals, Laughton established an esteemed reputation among senior Service members and the academic community by the 1890’s.³⁸ Within the Navy, his influence and contacts were impressive, which apart from Bridge, included intellectually progressive officers such Philip Colomb, Battenberg, and Admirals Sir R. Vesey Hamilton (Senior Naval Lord 1889-91), Sir A. Hoskins (Senior Naval Lord, 1891-93), Sir G. Phipps Hornby, and Sir E. Fanshawe. Drawing from this base, important political patrons, and influential academic/media contacts, Laughton garnered strong support for his and Bridge’s formation of the Navy Records Society (NRS) in June 1893

³⁶ J.K. Laughton, “The Scientific Study of Naval History”, *JRUSI*, Volume XVIII (1874), pp. 508-27; op cit, “Scientific Instruction in the Royal Navy”, *JRUSI*, Volume XIX (1875), pp. 217-41; “The Study of Naval History”, *JRUSI*, Volume XXXX, (1896), pp. 795-820; “The National Study of Naval History”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Volume XII, (London, 1898), pp. 81-93; A. Lambert, pp. 35-51, 114-41, 163-4, 166-7, 187-91; Schurman, *Education*, pp. 85-90.

³⁷ A. Lambert, pp. 74-5; Schurman, 87-8.

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp.84-5, 89-92, 96-7, 194-6; A. Lambert, pp. 54, 80, 88-92, 96-8, 185-6, *passim* and Bibliography for Laughton’s extensive works, pp 239-44.

to promote the study of naval history. Its achievement in promoting the serious study of naval history, strengthening the naval case in national defence, and its expansion into the historical profession was unparalleled.³⁹

The impact of Laughton's work, and the NRS, and RUSI's roles as intellectual forums, were important for the NID's examination of strategic issues as the Service's original naval "staff".⁴⁰ Bridge's recruitment of other "cerebral" officers such as Custance, ensured that the institutional contact between the NRS and NID remained long after his term as DNI expired in 1894. Battenberg, a former student of Laughton's and NRS charter member, maintained the connection between the department and Society when he became DNI in 1903. Along with Bridge, the strong link between the two bodies was exemplified by Reginald Custance who, as another founding member of the NRS, alternately played an integral administrative role in its affairs as Councillor and Vice-President between 1899 and 1914.⁴¹

Laughton's influence on Custance and their NRS collaboration was evident in the DNI's push to further strategic/tactical study within the War College and Admiralty itself. In early 1900, Custance proposed the creation of a "maritime operations" course at Greenwich that included: the preparation of operational plans, the study and investigation of tactical/strategic questions, and naval history. The scheme received the Board's final approval on 31st May 1900 with Captain Henry May appointed Director of the new Navy War Course which commenced at the College in September. Not under the NID's direct supervision it only lasted eight months, neglected officers below Commander's rank, and was not a "staff" college *per se*. Nevertheless, the Course familiarised officers with the conduct of maritime operations, historical instruction being a key component.⁴² It continued Laughton's original history and strategy lectures at

³⁹ Lambert, pp. 142-72; Schurman, pp. 91-6; Laughton, "Naval History", pp. 795-820; *Anatomy*, pp. 44-65; footnote 35 above.

⁴⁰ Schurman, pp. 7-9.

⁴¹ Lambert, pp. 33, 142-4, 149-50, 171, 197, 200, 223-4.

⁴² *Naval Staff*, pp. 41-2.

Greenwich first under Philip Colomb until 1895, and May afterwards.⁴³ Like Custance, May too was a NRS Councillor as was his successor as the War Course Director, Captain (later Rear-Admiral) E.J.W. Slade, who served as DNI between 1907 and 1909.⁴⁴ The closest link between Laughton's legacy and the War Course, however, was Julian Corbett who began lecturing at the College in 1902. Corbett, who owed his professional development as a historian to Laughton and the NRS, remained an integral link between the War Course/College and war planning during Fisher's first period as First Sea Lord.⁴⁵

If the Navy War Course was a rudimentary NID staff college, it is clear from Laughton's close association with Bridge, Custance, and Battenberg, that the NRS was the department's unofficial "historical section".⁴⁶ This was crucial for the future development of planning and strategic thought within the NID itself. The lack of methodical historical education within the Navy curtailed the creation of an effective staff system prior to 1914. Without trained officers to collate, assess intelligence, and produce analytical studies on naval policy and strategy, the Admiralty was reliant on those predisposed to such work who had benefited from private study. Given the Navy's educational structure, there were too few such men available even after the establishment of the NID in 1887. Invariably, those possessing the necessary talents within the department were linked to Laughton, who had recognised their abilities and encouraged their studies.⁴⁷ The department's appropriation of talent increased through its affiliation with the naval historical movement. By 1902, if not earlier, capable junior officers not generally associated with the NRS, such as George Ballard, continued strategic concepts born from the intellectual re-awakening within the Service stimulated by Laughton and

⁴³ D. Schurman, *Julian S. Corbett, 1854-1922: Historian of British Maritime Policy from Drake to Jellicoe*, (London, 1981), p. 32.

⁴⁴ Lambert, pp. 142, 187, 197-200, and Appendix, pp. 235-7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 147, 150-1, 156-8, 198-200, 216-7, 219, 223-4; Schurman, *Education*, Chapter 7; *op cit.*, *Corbett*, Chapters, 3, 5.

⁴⁶ Lambert, pp. 11, 142, 223, 229.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-7.

Philip Colomb .

The theory underpinning Philip Colomb's subsequent works, was outlined in his brother John's 1867 pamphlet, *The Protection of our Commerce and Distribution of our Naval Forces Considered*. Analysing contemporary shipping/trade statistics, he argued that Britain's unique global position was wholly attributable to naval power which, in turn, functioned through sea communications. The vulnerability of these communications could only be protected through Britain's panoply of world-wide naval bases.⁴⁸ In 1881, John Colomb had advocated the creation of a naval intelligence department where strategic information was assessed to produce realistic plans for the protection of Britain's vast overseas commerce. With no factual basis for his claim, he also believed that the traditional blockade of an enemy's ports remained the best strategy to protect England's commercial trade.⁴⁹

Philip Colomb's service career was that of an atypical technical officer which, despite his accomplishments in signalling and steam tactics, led to his categorisation as an "armchair expert". Retiring from active service in 1886, he assumed Laughton's lecture series at Greenwich and made Vice-Admiral in 1892--a year before becoming a founding member of the NRS. Presenting various technical papers throughout the 1860's, it was not until the 1870's that Colomb's exposure to the RUSI and Laughton affected his formative development as a Service intellectual.⁵⁰

Influenced by Laughton's "Scientific Study" paper and their regular contact at the RUSI, Colomb integrated the former's methodology into his work by the late 1870's.⁵¹ The shift in approach was evident in his 1878 RUSI Gold Medal Essay, "Great Britain's Maritime Power" where he infused historical examples to flesh out his brother's theories

⁴⁸ Schurman, *Education*, pp. 24-6.

⁴⁹ Colomb, "Naval Intelligence and Protection of Commerce in War", pp. 553-78; B. Semmel, *Liberalism and Naval Strategy: Ideology, Interest, and Sea Power During the "Pax Britannica"*, (Boston, 1986), pp. 89-90.

⁵⁰ Schurman, *Education*, pp. 36-8; Gordon, *Rules*, pp. 184-91.

⁵¹ Lambert, p. 106; Schurman, *Education*, pp. 40-1.

on trade protection and imperial defence. Three dominant themes emerged, backed by historical “facts”: (1) Britain traditionally based her naval force on her special requirements as a maritime state rather than as a response to foreign construction; (2) Britain’s naval role was traditionally defensive (i.e.), invasion and trade protection; (3) the Navy should adopt certain broad principles, equally applicable to war and peacetime conditions, before adhering to “absolute” theories of naval power. Conceptually linked to Laughton’s 1874 work, it was the first example of a Service professional basing his case on historical examples.⁵²

Colomb’s conversion was discernable in two 1887 *RUSI* papers: one on blockade, the other, convoys, and both synonymous with his brother’s views on imperial/trade defence. His method utilised the “real” past to reach general principles/rules applicable to contemporary naval conditions. Colomb identified three different blockade types: the “sealing-up” of an enemy port, “masking” an enemy force in its base, and “observing” an enemy fleet in port or adjacent to it. From the evidence, he surmised that there had never been a successful example of the first category of blockade in the past. The blockade concept was not, however, inapplicable to modern conditions of steam and the torpedo. Steam, if anything, enhanced blockade under the “masking” and “observational” categories, while effective anti-torpedo drill and inclement weather would deter torpedo-craft attacks on a blockading fleet.⁵³ Colomb’s blockade categorisation and Laughton’s similar views resurfaced in the strategy developed by the NID between 1888-1904. Colomb’s most influential works appeared in 1888-89, inaugurating the “blue-water school” of naval strategy which, along with Alfred Thayer Mahan’s and Laughton’s work, became the intellectual base for increased naval expenditure in national defence.⁵⁴ The “blue-water” approach, again integrating his

⁵² P.H. Colomb, “Great Britain’s Maritime Power”, *JRUSI* (1878); Schurman, *Education*, pp. 39-41.

⁵³ P.H. Colomb, “Blockade: Under existing conditions of Warfare” and “Convoys: are they any longer possible?”, *Naval Warfare*, (London, 1891), pp. 194-229, 230-57; Schurman, *Education*, p. 45.

⁵⁴ *Anatomy*, pp. 45-61; Semmel, pp. 88-9, 91-3, 95, 102; Lambert, pp. 114-16.

brother's theories. appeared in a May 1888 RUSI paper, "The Naval Defences of the United Kingdom". Colomb argued for a purely naval conception of national defence against invasion and deprecated the financial waste incurred by shore defences. Utilising historical precedents, he demonstrated that there were two traditional methods of curtailing invasion: (1) the Earl St. Vincent method of a close blockade on an enemy's port or, (2) Lord Howe's defensive waiting posture with the fleet intact. Either system would protect Britain from invasion and safeguard seaborne trade in the south western approaches. With adequate naval dispositions, there was no need to fortify British harbours or ports.⁵⁵

At the RUSI in March 1889, Colomb again used historical examples to destroy the Army's counter argument for fortifications. He furthered his "blue-water" thesis using history to reveal truisms in Britain's traditional naval defence against invasion. When the soldiers attempted to invalidate the historical method, Colomb defended history as the basis for strategic studies and was backed up by Laughton in the audience. The latter's support revealed Colomb's maturation as a historian and the growing confluence of their strategic views.⁵⁶

From the introduction of the "blue-water" debate until his death in 1899, Colomb promoted the naval case in national strategy. A collection of his essays were published in 1891 as *Naval Warfare* which was, next to his biography of Cooper Key, perhaps his most influential historical piece.⁵⁷ Colomb's theme was that sea power would only benefit a nation if "command of the sea" was assured. Citing the seventeenth century Dutch Wars as proof that decisive fleet actions guaranteed "command of the sea", it was a natural progression that commerce was safeguarded and ancillary operations against an enemy's communications or territory made possible. Examining projected invasion

⁵⁵ P.H. Colomb, "The Naval Defences of the United Kingdom", *JRUSI*, (1888), pp. 565-601; Ranft, "Protection", pp. 1-2; Schurman, *Education*, pp. 46-9.

⁵⁶ P.H. Colomb, "The Relations between Local Fortifications and a Moving Navy", *JRUSI*, (1889), pp. 149-202; Schurman, *Education*, 48-51; Lambert, pp. 106-07, 111-2.

⁵⁷ Gordon, *Rules*, p. 186; Schurman, *Education*, pp. 52-3; Lambert, pp. 126-30.

attempts between 1690 and 1805, he concluded that a “fleet-in-being” had secured Britain’s inviolability.⁵⁸ *Naval Warfare* was significant because it utilised history as a credible source from which to elucidate principles surrounding the nature and applications of sea power.⁵⁹

Laughton endorsed Colomb’s work in a June 1893 RUSI summation which reviewed *Naval Warfare* alongside Mahan’s two *Influence of Sea Power* works. Laughton supported Colomb’s argument that fixed fortifications were wasted expenditure better spent on the Navy. Analysing the “fleet-in-being” concept, Laughton argued that although the historical appreciations were abstract, Colomb’s basic intent was sound.⁶⁰ The conjoining of their views was evident in the NRS and associated academic endeavours such as Laughton’s *From Howard to Nelson* as a “text” for the Naval College.⁶¹ Their use of the past to elucidate underlying tenets and shared strategic views, such as the relevance of a modern blockade, had a lasting impact.

Given Colomb’s adoption of Laughton’s methodology, it was not surprising that the latter should back the former’s “blue water” thesis, especially since the past had conclusively demonstrated the necessity of a fleet (i.e. the Armada’s defeat). At minimum, Britain required a battle fleet equal to Colomb’s “fleet-in-being”.⁶² Another axiom shared by Laughton and Colomb was the concentration of force against an enemy’s most vulnerable points. Laughton had explored and developed this theme in his 1874 “Scientific Study” paper by utilising the historical examples of Suffren, Rodney, and Nelson. Related to “concentration” was the creation of strategic plans to force a reluctant enemy into battle to ensure a decisive defeat. For Laughton, traditional methods

⁵⁸ P. Colomb, *Naval Warfare*, pp. 1-2, 24, 46, 81, 107-221; Schurman, *Education*, pp. 53-4.

⁵⁹ Schurman, *Education*, pp. 55-7; Lambert, pp. 126-7, 231.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 108, 126-7, 130-1, 144.

⁶¹ Lambert, pp. 149, 186-7; Marder, *Anatomy*, pp. 68-78; Kerr, *Battenberg*, pp. 116-21; J.K. Laughton (ed), *From Howard to Nelson: Twelve Sailors*, (London, 1899), pp. 399-468.

⁶² Lambert, pp. 107-08, 125, 130-1.

of blockade and trade protection were the best methods of attaining a fleet action and destruction of an enemy's fleet. This equated with Colomb's maxim that "the frontier of our Empire is the enemy's coast", or more specifically an enemy's main naval bases.⁶³ While the "concentration" principle was well known, it had some import on the debate over the Navy's offensive role in the 1880'-90's and remained the central tenet behind arguments for a blockade strategy. Laughton and Colomb provided a reliable impetus for the adoption of that particular strategy.

Laughton endorsed Colomb's 1887 contention that there were distinct forms of blockade, only some that were applicable to modern conditions. Since a "close" blockade had never occurred in the past, Laughton believed that future "observational" blockades by scouts and smaller inshore squadrons off an enemy's base were feasible if the main fleet were kept at an appropriate distance to intervene.⁶⁴ With suitable forces, an enemy's fortified harbours could be blockaded by a superior fleet. Alternately, until that fleet were defeated or removed, invasion and enemy depredations on commerce were impossible. In keeping with Colomb's "blue-water" theory, heavy local fortifications were a needless extravagance.⁶⁵ The meshing of Colomb's "blue-water" concepts, Laughton's views on "command of the sea", and the blockade's viability emerged in his review of Royal Engineer Major George S. Clark's book *Fortifications* in 1891. Agreeing with Clark's main argument *a la* Colomb, Laughton dismissed forts as necessary if the fleet were decoyed or drawn away. History had disproved the last possibility. If sustained, "command of the sea" ensured the conduct of all forms of naval operations--bereft of enemy interference. The attainment of "command" and its concomitant operations was only possible through a powerful fleet "masking" the enemy in its bases; the same blockade category he and Colomb had identified as a timeless axiom in their historical

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 44-6, 106-08; Schurman, *Education*, p. 105.

⁶⁴ J.K. Laughton, "Recent Naval Literature", *JRUSI*, Vol. 37 (November 1893), pp. 1161-82.; op cit., review of J. Leyland's, *The Blockade of Brest, 1803-1805*, *The Edinburgh Review*, (January 1903), pp. 1-33; Colomb, *Naval Warfare*, pp. 194-229; Lambert, pp. 22, 131-2, 207-08.

⁶⁵ Lambert, pp. 107-08; J.K. Laughton, "Naval Supremacy and Naval Tactics", *The Edinburgh Review*, (January 1890), pp. 146-78.

work.⁶⁶ It was not coincidental that this strategy became the dominant theme in NID-designed fleet manoeuvres between 1888 and 1904 when Laughton's and Colomb's colleagues, Bridge, Custance, and Battenberg, served as successive DNI's. During this period, the "observational" blockade emerged as the Admiralty's primary strategy against France.

IV.

The rise of the *Jeune Ecole* doctrine after 1885 led to the Admiralty's reappraisal of its strategic options to counter perceived threats posed by the cruisers and torpedo-craft espoused by the French Aube Ministry of Marine. Believing that Britain could not effectively protect its vast overseas commerce from attack and maintain a traditional blockade, the *Jeune Ecole* theory struck at the core of British strategic conceptions.⁶⁷ Implemented as a response to the new French theorem, the 1889 Naval Defence Act remedied the Royal Navy's material problems by reapplying the old Two Power Standard in shipbuilding against foreign competitors and met the challenge of a *guerre de course* against British trade through a large cruiser construction programme.⁶⁸ Strategically, however, the Navy's ability to implement an offensive blockade remained questionable. The Admiralty's first manoeuvres, during the 1885 Russian "war scare" and after the 1887 Jubilee Review, did not clarify how torpedo-craft and the *Jeune Ecole* would affect the Navy's traditional strategy. Apart from the torpedo ram HMS *Polyphemus*'s exploits at Berehaven in 1885 and an unrealistic torpedo-craft attack against anchored ironclads at Spithead and Portland in 1887, manoeuvres did not address strategic problems associated with a blockade under modern conditions.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Lambert, pp. 110-12; J.K. Laughton, "Forts and Fleets", *The Quarterly Review*, (April 1891), pp. 351-79.

⁶⁷ T. Ropp, *The Development of a Modern Navy: French Naval Policy, 1871-1904*, (Annapolis, 1987), pp. 155-80.

⁶⁸ Mullins, "Sharpening the Trident"; *Anatomy*, pp. 125-43; Ropp, *Development*, pp. 205-10; Preston, "Victorian Navy", pp. 374-8.

⁶⁹ Thursfield, *The Navy and the Nation*, pp. 68-9; Naval Manoeuvres 1887, NID Report No. 137, November 1887, ADM 231/11, NID Reports, 1887.

The NID's first exercise to address a specific strategic question, the July-August 1888 Manoeuvres examined a close blockade on an enemy's base under conditions resembling a war with France. The blockade emphasis was timely given its exploration of *Jeune Ecole* tenets and followed Colomb's 1887 paper on blockades.⁷⁰ Coincidentally, he served as a Fleet Umpire during the exercise. The manoeuvres' premise involved a superior British fleet, "A", commanded by Vice-Admiral J.K.E. Baird, blockading two separate squadrons of "B" Fleet (French) under Rear-Admiral Sir George Tryon at "strongly fortified" anchorages at Berehaven (Brest) and Lough Swilly (Cherbourg) in Ireland. Tryon's "B1" and "B2" Squadrons would attempt an escape from their bases to conduct three operations: attacks on "B's" commerce, his ports, or troop landings on "British" territory. Baird would contain Tryon's forces, but should they escape, "A" was tasked to hunt them down and protect commerce. The exercise was meant to clarify the: "Relative advantages and disadvantages of keeping the main body of a fleet off the port to be blockaded, with an inshore squadron; and of keeping the main body of the blockading fleet at a base, with a squadron of cruisers and torpedo-boats off the port, with means of rapid communication with a fleet." Torpedo-craft employment and the "Special dangers" attending blockading squadrons off an enemy's port were subsidiary concerns. Baird initially conducted a successful close blockade with an inshore squadron of torpedo-boats and torpedo-gunboats ("catchers") at Berehaven but Tryon effected a successful "break-out" of heavy ships from both locales in early August. Baird raised both blockades to prevent a junction between "B"'s squadrons and moved back to protect the Thames, while Tryon's united fleet "raided" Liverpool and Britain's north-east coast.⁷¹ The outcome appeared to invalidate the "sealing-up" blockade categorised by Philip Colomb.

Despite the failure to "seal in" Tryon's squadrons, summations by senior officers involved with the manoeuvres did not dismiss the blockade concept. Baird believed that

⁷⁰ Ropp, p. 210.

⁷¹ Naval Manoeuvres 1888, NID Report No. 179, October 1888, ADM 231/14, pp. 6-8, and *passim*.

these operations were still feasible, provided that ironclad and cruiser dispositions on the outer blockade line were strengthened and a Reserve Fleet stationed “at all times” in the English Channel. Since “B”’s “break-out” occurred at night under poor visibility, Baird maintained that his blockade dispositions were sound, apart from a lack of inshore torpedo-boats due to breakdowns, coal shortages, and crew fatigue. To overcome these deficiencies, a “refuge” should be established near the blockade to refuel, rest, and refit the inshore squadrons. Baird preferred torpedo-gunboats over torpedo-boats on the inshore line and saw them as essential for all blockading purposes.⁷² A Manoeuvre Umpire, Rear-Admiral A. Butler, was “unhesitatingly” sure “that the days of effectually blockading a port are at an end”, but did not rule out other forms of blockade. Future blockades would involve an “observation” system with enemy ports watched by inshore cruiser-“catcher” flotillas, supported by the main fleet in reserve.⁷³ Another Umpire, Rear-Admiral N. Bowden-Smith, also deprecated the blockade because of the torpedo-boat menace, “a source of constant annoyance and anxiety to the blockading force at night”, but believed that fast cruiser squadrons attached to the blockaders would offset liabilities in lying off an enemy’s base.⁷⁴

To clarify these inconsistent appraisals, the Admiralty appointed a special panel of three senior officers, Admirals Sir W.M. Dowell, Sir R. Vesey Hamilton, and Rear-Admiral Sir Frederick W. Richards, to investigate “lessons” from the summer exercise. Establishing a norm in required fleet strength that influenced the Naval Defence Act, the “Three Admirals” confirmed that “close” blockades were possible with a certain ratio of superiority.

Under the altered conditions which steam, and the development of the locomotive torpedoes, have introduced into naval warfare, it will not be found practicable to maintain an effective blockade of an enemy’s squadron in strongly

⁷² *Ibid*, Appendix V., Report of Vice-Admiral in command of “A” Squadron....in connection with the Naval Manoeuvres, September 12, 1888., pp. 159-61.

⁷³ *Ibid*, Appendix VII., Summary of Notes, &c., taken by Umpire, 20th August, 1888, pp. 175-8.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*., Summary of Notes taken by Umpire, 22nd August, 1888, pp. 179-81.

fortified ports, by keeping the main body of the fleet off the port to be blockaded without the blockading battle-ships being in the proportion of at least 5 to 3, to allow a sufficient margin for casualties-to which the enemy's vessels in a secure harbour would not be exposed-and the necessary periodical absence of a portion of the blockading squadron for the purpose of replenishing fuel, making good defects &c. A still larger proportion might be necessary if the area to be covered by the blockaders was extensive.

The admirals surmised that a suitable anchorage near the blockade, an advanced base, and a swift inshore squadron in good communications with the main fleet, would reduce the ratio to 4 to 3. Like Baird, they agreed that the blockade's weakness was the torpedo-boats which, because of poor endurance and sea keeping qualities, were suited to the defence but "would inevitably prove a cause of embarrassment and anxiety" to the blockaders. Conversely, torpedo-gunboats with good speed and coal capacity remained the core of the inshore squadron and of "incalculable value" in thwarting enemy torpedo-craft attacks and scouting for the main blockading fleet.⁷⁵ Confirming that blockade of an enemy's ports was not impossible but that "the methods of blockade adopted in 1888 must be modified in accordance with the experience thus gained"⁷⁶, the "Three Admirals Report" became the basis for further manoeuvres to test the strategy and the related torpedo-boat question.

The 1889 Manoeuvres followed the premise of Colomb's "masking" and "observational" blockade categories. Reversing the 1888 exercise, Tryon, commanding "A" (British) Fleet masked Baird's smaller "B" (enemy) Fleet in two divisions at Berehaven and Queenstown. Operating from Milford Haven, Tryon would maintain "a vigilant watch" over "B"'s ports with cruisers/scouts and distribute his forces to intercept Baird should he sortie from his Irish bases. After "breaking out", Baird sent a fast raiding squadron towards the Thames. Tryon had, however, placed his fleet in the vicinity of

⁷⁵ Admiralty. *Extracts from the Report of the Committee on the Naval Manoeuvres, 1888: Together with the Narrative of the Operations and the Rules Laid Down for Conducting the Same*, (London: HMSO, February 1889), pp. 5-6., NLMD; *Anatomy*, pp. 107-10; Ropp, p. 212.

⁷⁶Thurfield, *Navy and the Nation*, pp. 74-5.

Falmouth-Ushant and defeated Baird's squadron which retired back to Queenstown.⁷⁷ While these manoeuvres had apparently shown that the "masking blockade" had "completely failed in its aim", such an assessment is not that clear-cut.⁷⁸ Tryon had complete latitude to dispose his fleet as he saw fit and with intelligence from his inshore cruisers/scouts was able to forestall the passage of "B"'s raiders up the Channel.⁷⁹ A superior "fleet-in-being" and "masking" blockade had facilitated Tryon's dispositions by giving him a clear indication of Baird's intentions.

Throughout 1890-1894, fleet exercises/manoeuvres focussed primarily on the torpedo-craft issue rather than examining blockade systems *per se*. Designed by Bridge and the NID, these scenarios were nonetheless relevant to the blockade question in assessing anti-torpedo counter measures by "core" vessels on the inshore lines: torpedo-gunboats and their later derivative, the destroyer.⁸⁰ The manoeuvres also examined the utilisation of "advanced" flotilla bases against an enemy's port suggested in the 1888 manoeuvres and "Three Admirals" report. This first occurred during the August 1890 Manoeuvres which simulated British trade defence against an enemy's *guerre de course*. Utilising Alderney as a "distant base", cruisers and torpedo-craft of Vice-Admiral Sir Michael Culme-Seymour's "C" Fleet launched an "ably planned and admirably conducted" attack on Tryon's "A" Fleet in Plymouth Sound, but were unsuccessful against the "British" Reserve Squadron, "B", at Portland. Tryon effectively protected the trade route from "C"'s depredations by withdrawing to the Scillies and employed scouting cruisers to detect the enemy's movements.⁸¹ Emulating "French" tactics/strategy, Culme-Seymour's use of Alderney and his opening attack on "A" Fleet

⁷⁷ Manoeuvres 1889, NID Report No. 215., December 1889, ADM 231/16.

⁷⁸ Partridge, "Close Blockade", p. 125.

⁷⁹ Thursfield, *Navy and the Nation*, pp. 79-81.

⁸⁰ A. Cowpe, "The Royal Navy and the Whitehead Torpedo" in Ranft (ed), *Technical Change*, pp. 33-4.

⁸¹ 1890 Manoeuvres, NID Report No. 252., ADM 231/18, pp. 12-20, 30-9.

could have equally simulated a British flotilla attack on a French fleet at Cherbourg or elsewhere along the Brittany/Normandy coasts.

“Special” torpedo-craft exercises associated with the 1891 Manoeuvres were a clear demonstration of the potential ineffectiveness of the torpedo-boat when confronted by an offensive British response. The exercise involved an attack by torpedo-boats from Irish ports in the St. George’s Channel on a “British” ironclad squadron with supporting cruisers and torpedo-gunboats based at Milford Haven. The commander of the latter squadron, Captain S. Long, accosted enemy flotillas off their bases where his gunboats did “uncommonly well”, accounting for nearly 90% of the torpedo-boats destroyed, captured, or disabled. Although the manoeuvre rules were somewhat skewed against the “enemy” torpedo-craft, the torpedo-gunboats’ performance in an active defence role confirmed the earlier observations by Baird and the “Three Admirals” that they were a vital component in any successful inshore “watch” off an enemy base.⁸²

Over the next three years, manoeuvres examined disputed “command of the sea” scenarios but paid close attention to the torpedo-boat threat and British counter-measures. The objective of the August 1892 Manoeuvres was the junction of two separate divisions of *Red* Fleet, defended by a squadron of “catchers” and torpedo-boats, in “narrow waters” against *Blue*, an enemy squadron comprised of cruisers, a torpedo-boat flotilla, and coast defence vessels based on the eastern and southern Irish coasts. *Red* successfully united its divisions through the intervention of its anti-torpedo squadron, while *Blue*’s flotilla attacks “such as might be taken in actual warfare” were beaten off. The balance of *Red*’s claims against *Blue*’s torpedo-craft were “clearly in favour” of its supporting torpedo-gunboats. Deductions from the exercise, however, still realised the torpedo-boat danger in narrow waters and cautioned that any fleet operating within their vicinity in a strait or channel would have its movements seriously curtailed.⁸³

⁸² 1891 Manoeuvres, NID Report No. 228., ADM 231/17; F. T. Jane, *The British Battle Fleet: Its Inception and Growth Throughout the Centuries to the Present Day, Volume II*, (London, 1915), pp. 77-8; Thursfield, *Navy and the Nation*, pp. 86-8.

⁸³ 1892 Manoeuvres, NID Report No. 332., March 1893, ADM 231/22; Bridge to Custance, August 11, 1892, Bridge MSS, BRI/18, Part 4. (1890-94).

For Bridge, the 1892 Manoeuvres were a “most instructive” validation of British anti-torpedo tactics which “practically settled the position of the torpedo-boat in war.” Remaining a “nuisance that cannot be disregarded”, he believed that torpedo-boats “will have no determining effect upon the course of a war.” While Britain required a certain number of boats for offensive purposes, he stressed the acquisition of “a very large number of ‘catchers’ of small size”. An increase in torpedo-gunboats and base defences ensured: “that we have done all that can be done to defend our fleets against torpedo-boat attack.”⁸⁴ The DNI’s views were fairly representative of the Admiralty’s own assessment of the torpedo-boat “threat”, but like Bridge it was cognizant that this “weapon of the weaker naval powers” still had to be countered.⁸⁵

The 1893-94 Manoeuvres also simulated the junction of fleet divisions in “narrow seas” within range of hostile torpedo flotillas based on an opposing shore. During the 1893 evolutions, *Blue* Fleet’s torpedo flotilla performed rather well despite *Red* Fleet’s re-employing boats that had been labelled out of action. The Umpire’s report stressed that torpedo-craft should not be under-rated, especially in a loose blockade scenario as: “it would seem impossible for a fleet, situated as the *Red* Fleet was, to obtain command of a sea whose hostile shore is covered with a torpedo flotilla, unless these were destroyed or captured;”.⁸⁶ This assessment was, however, offset by torpedo-boat performance in the 1894 manoeuvres. All the boats of *Red*’s flotilla, save one, were successfully intercepted during their attack on “D” *Blue* Fleet’s passage through the “narrow waters” of the North Channel between Scotland and Ireland. *Blue*’s flotilla operations were “practically *nil*” owing to bad weather, another factor to which torpedo-craft were particularly susceptible.⁸⁷ The 1890-1894 exercises implied that successful

⁸⁴ Bridge to Custance, August 18, October 3, 1892, Bridge MSS, BRI/18, Part. 4.

⁸⁵ *Anatomy*, pp. 165-7.

⁸⁶ 1893 Manoeuvres, NID Report No. 372, February 1894, ADM 231/23.

⁸⁷ 1894 Manoeuvres, NID Report No. 401, November 1894, J. R. Thursfield MSS, THU/1/1., Papers and Correspondence with Sir John Fisher, Box 2.

torpedo-boat attacks on a fleet “masking” or “watching” an enemy base were questionable due to the effectiveness of British counter-measures and limitations with the boats themselves.

Related to a “watch” on an enemy’s debouches was the development of the advanced base theme throughout the 1890’s. Alluded to in the “Three Admirals” report and employed during the 1890 manoeuvres, the concept was examined by the NID as part of a Mediterranean strategy against the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Bridge proposed a plan to seize either Lemnos Island in the north-eastern Aegean or Suda Bay in Crete to watch the Dardanelles/Levant for moves by the Black Sea Fleet into the Mediterranean.⁸⁸ Another combination considered by Bridge and Philip Colomb was Minorca’s use as a forward base against a Franco-Russian Mediterranean combination.⁸⁹ From 1892 to 1896, Bridge; his successor as DNI, Captain (later Admiral Sir) Lewis Beaumont (DNI 1894-99); and the First Naval Lord, Admiral Sir Frederick Richards (1893-99) all viewed Lemnos as a viable forward base to counter a Russian *coup de main* on Constantinople, the Dardanelles, and to exclude the Black Sea Fleet from the Mediterranean.⁹⁰ With the growing threat to British commerce posed by the development of France’s *défenses mobiles*, its new ‘armoured’ cruiser programme, and French bases in the Channel/Atlantic after 1890⁹¹, the advance base theme remained a central component in the NID/Admiralty’s strategic formulations.

⁸⁸ Bridge to Custance, February 11, October 20, 1890, Bridge MSS, BRI/18, Part 4.

⁸⁹ Bridge to Custance, February 18, 1890, *Ibid.*; *Anatomy*, pp. 144-61; Ropp, pp. 200-5, 246-8.

⁹⁰ “DNI’s Copy-Letter by Evan Macgregor (Admiralty Secretary), May 20, with enclosure of joint report of March 18, 1892 by DNI, Captain Cyprian Bridge, and the DMI, E.F. Chapman, on question of Russian *coup de main* on Constantinople”; Memorandum by DNI, Lewis Beaumont, February 29, 1896; DNI, Lewis Beaumont, “Memorandum on Naval Policy viewed under the existing conditions—given to Sir F. Richards”, October 28, 1896, ADM 116/866B, Naval Staff Memoranda, 1889-1912. “Questions by Arthur Balfour on the Mediterranean Question and Replies by Admiral Sir Frederick Richards.”, November 19, 1895, ADM 116/3089, Mediterranean Station Naval Strategy and Policy, Views of Various C-in-C’s and Others, 1888-94. Memoranda, 1895-96; *Anatomy*, pp. 246-51.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 164-5; Ropp, pp. 232-8, 254-9, 293-8.

The Admiralty's procurement programmes also indicated an offensive blockade strategy against the Dual Alliance in the 1890's and early 1900's. Introduced after the 1885 Russian War Scare, torpedo-gunboats were smaller, faster derivatives of contemporary cruisers and a deliberate response to increased Franco-Russian torpedo-craft construction and the threat posed to the British blockade strategy. During the 1888-92 manoeuvres, the earlier types (*Rattlesnake*, *Grasshopper* and *Sharpshooter* Classes) proved themselves particularly effective in the latter role and their original mission of "catching" enemy torpedo-boats despite boiler problems which limited their effective speed. The "prototype" for the modern destroyer after 1902, the Admiralty was obviously content with the "catchers" performance during the manoeuvres and its capabilities in an inshore blockading role. Thirteen improved gunboats (*Sharpshooter* and *Alarm* Class) were provided for under the Naval Defence Act, with an additional six (*Halcyons*) laid down before the supplementary Spencer Programme in 1894, all remaining in service into the late 1890's alongside their successors, the early destroyers.⁹²

Endorsing "catchers" in 1892, Bridge had recommended a faster, more diminutive version for fleet defence and inshore flotilla work--a sentiment shared by others at the Admiralty. The development of the torpedo-boat destroyer has long been associated with Rear-Admiral John Fisher's inspiration as Admiralty Controller (1892-96) and his collaboration with the torpedo-craft firm of Alfred Yarrow and the Director of Naval Construction (DNC), Sir William White, (1886-1902).⁹³ The doctrine that the "torpedo boat is the answer to the torpedo boat" was, however, first explored by Germany and Austria in the 1880's. In Britain, Yarrow and the other leading torpedo-craft firm, Thornycroft, designed "torpedo-boat destroyers" long before they were

⁹² R. Gardiner (ed), *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships, 1860-1905*, (London, 1979), pp. 87-90; Jane, *British Battle Fleet* v.2., pp. 57, 60-1, 76-81, 90-8; Preston, "Victorian Navy". p. 372.

⁹³ *Conway's, 1860-1905*, p. 87; E. J. March, *British Destroyers: A History of Development, 1892-1953*, (London, 1966), pp. 24-6; F. Manning, *The Life of Sir William White*, (London, 1923), pp. 323-4; Mackay, *Fisher*, pp 204-5; *Anatomy*, pp. 167-8.

officially sanctioned by Whitehall.⁹⁴ Fisher's interest in countering larger and faster French torpedo-craft dated from 1891 when he was still Director of Naval Ordnance (DNO).

Based on information from Bridge, Fisher outlined the strategic exigencies demanding a new vessel type. In the event of a war with France, a "watch" on Cherbourg and Brest were difficult given French torpedo stations in the Channel. As this also endangered British merchant traffic: "it would be absolutely necessary at any cost either to destroy the torpedo-boats and....the stations of Boulogne, Calais, and Dunkirk, or so watch them as to paralyse the torpedo-boats." The "destroyers" Fisher proposed were faster than "catchers" and larger than torpedo-boats giving them better seagoing characteristics than their intended prey. With powerful quick-firing armament and torpedo-tubes, the new vessels were handier and considerably cheaper than torpedo-gunboats. Apart from "Channel protection", the duties of these larger torpedo-boats included: the "hunting down" of an enemy's torpedo-craft, "watching" their stations, and inshore observational work off Cherbourg and Brest. The strategic requirements for these operations was clearly stipulated: "*as our real line of defence lies on the French side of the Channel*". Since torpedo-boats lacked the necessary sea-going qualities and cruisers would have to retire at night due to enemy flotillas, Fisher endorsed the wholesale construction of the new type for inshore tasks.⁹⁵

In collusion with White, Yarrow, and Thornycroft, Fisher introduced and successfully tested the first "destroyers", *Havock* and *Hornet*, in 1893-94.⁹⁶ Under Lord Spencer's expansive five year construction program initiated in March 1894, expenditure

⁹⁴ Conway's, 1860-1905, p. 87; Jane, *British Battle Fleet* v.2., pp. 128-9.

⁹⁵ DNO. Fisher, "Increase in French Torpedo-boat Harbours and Distribution of Torpedo-boats in the Channel and on the French Coast, with Suggestions as to the best way of meeting these Tactics", February 1891. Admiralty Print in *Notes for the Navy Debates, 1896-97*, pp. 111-4., NLMD.

⁹⁶ Refer to footnote 94 above; Jane, 128-9.

on the new destroyers rose substantially.⁹⁷ The introduction of 36 27-*knot* boats in 1893-4 was followed by 66 larger and more seaworthy 30-*knotters* laid down or purchased between 1894 and 1899.⁹⁸ With the adoption of the destroyer type in the mid-1890's, the Admiralty was strengthening the *matériel* basis for its offensive blockade strategy off the French northern ports. It has been argued that the destroyer construction policy in the 1890's was a self-legitimising excuse for continuing the blockade strategy when it should have been more seriously evaluated or discarded.⁹⁹ The introduction of improved destroyers and replacements for the torpedo-gunboats after 1902, war orders, flotilla distribution/organisation, 1900-04 "blockade" exercises, and the use of manoeuvres to evaluate these new vessels, however, contest the above argument and other assessments that the close blockade was dead by 1904.¹⁰⁰

The 1895-99 Manoeuvres again examined the torpedo boat issue and evaluated the new destroyers' effectiveness. Yet unlike the 1890-94 exercises, the dominance of British anti-torpedo measures was not always clear. Tactical torpedo-boat exercises in 1895 confirmed that destroyers were best employed in a patrolling, "hunting" type blockade role and were unsuited to fleet escort due to their inability to sustain constant cruising speeds.¹⁰¹ Their weaknesses in fleet scenarios was apparent during the 1896 Manoeuvres--an exercise specifically designed to test destroyers against torpedo-boats. A defending "British" fleet, "A-B", with a strong destroyer force, could not prevent the junction of "C-D" fleet, supported by torpedo flotillas. The results of the flotilla engagements were mixed, with "C-D" losing half of its torpedo craft primarily to a second class cruiser, indicating the "impossibility" of a flotilla attack against a fast, well

⁹⁷ For the 1893 Naval Scare and the institution of the Spencer Programme see: *Anatomy*, pp. 174-205; J.T. Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Strategy: Finance, Technology, and British Naval Policy, 1889-1914*, (London, 1989), p. 352, Table 10. Admiralty destroyer expenditure, 1889-1914.

⁹⁸ *Conway's, 1860-1905*, pp. 90-7.

⁹⁹ Cowpes, "Whitehead Torpedo", in Ranft (ed), *Technical Change*, pp. 34-6.

¹⁰⁰ Patridge, "Close Blockade", pp. 127-33.

¹⁰¹ Torpedo-boat Tactical Exercises, 1895, NID Report No. 446, ADM 231/26.

armed cruiser in broad daylight. “A-B’s” destroyers were a negligible component, all but one being “captured” in the evolutions.¹⁰² Simulating an enemy fleet’s (“A”) attempted interdiction of a convoy (“C”) escorted by a slow, but superior “British” fleet (“B”), the 1899 Manoeuvres were a better demonstration of the destroyers’ effectiveness against torpedo-boats. While the C-in-C “A” Fleet, Vice-Admiral H. H. Rawson, complained that the manoeuvre rules gave destroyers “a charmed existence” against battleships and cruisers, the work of “B” Fleet’s destroyers was “very satisfactory” and “exceptionally good”. None of “A’s” torpedo-boats could move without being captured or incapacitated.¹⁰³ Although the outcomes of these manoeuvres varied, they again highlighted the questionable nature of the torpedo-boat threat, were valuable “test-beds” for the new destroyers, and indirectly validated that the Navy’s anti-torpedo counter measures could sustain a “watch” on an enemy’s bases.¹⁰⁴

By early 1896, it was evident that the Admiralty’s primary strategy involved close “observational” or “masking” blockades against French Atlantic/Channel ports. In a May 1896 NID report examining the blockade’s feasibility off French naval bases, a Cherbourg operation was surprisingly ruled out due to the strong currents in its vicinity which made flotilla coaling bases “within easy distance” , (Channel Islands), impracticable. It could only be maintained “under circumstances of great and constant danger”. If a blockade were attempted, vessels would have to relieve each other to coal at either Portland (63 miles) or Plymouth (72 miles), denuding the blockading force’s strength for periods up to two days. Operations off Toulon were likewise rejected due to enhanced defensive works in the nearby Hyères roadstead. Conditions for a blockade of the Brittany ports were, however, “more favourable”. A coaling base on Ushant or Les Saintes gave a British blockading fleet control over the entrance to Brest. As for Lorient,

¹⁰² Naval Manoeuvres 1896, NID Report No. 474, December 1896, (61 pp.) ADM 231/27.

¹⁰³ Naval Manoeuvres 1899, NID Report No. 556, December 1899, (99 pp.) , Thursfield MSS, THU/1/1, Box 2., *passim* and pp. 37-9, 64-7.

¹⁰⁴ The 1897 Manoeuvres were concerned with the work of cruisers in a fleet scouting role, while the 1898 Manoeuvres were cancelled due to coal shortages. Naval Manoeuvres 1897, NID Report No. 498, January 1898, Thursfield MSS., THU/1/1, Box 2; *Anatomy*, p. 315.

possession of Ille de Groix made the blockaders task “a comparatively easy one” since a blockading fleet or inshore squadron could safely coal anywhere near Ille de Groix and Bellisle.¹⁰⁵

After 1895, a vast Naval Works programme was undertaken to strengthen Channel bases at Portsmouth, Portland, and Plymouth and turn them into protected anchorages for British fleets operating off French northern bases. With the extension of the nearby facilities at Devonport and Keyham, Plymouth became the centre of an entire system orientated towards offensive operations off Brest. New secondary bases were built west of Plymouth at Falmouth and in the Scilly Islands to extend British operations fifty miles closer to Brest. Despite the 1896 NID report on French bases, the Channel Islands were projected as extensions of Portland for a “watch” on Cherbourg--a scenario outlined in the August 1890 Manoeuvres.¹⁰⁶ These developments, along with manoeuvres and procurement, indicated that the Admiralty was incorporating the advanced base concept as an integral part of the NID’s offensive blockade strategy against France. The fusion of the two strategic themes, however, was the outcome of an essay by Commander George A. Ballard.

A student of naval history his entire life, Ballard was marginally connected with Laughton, Colomb, and the historical revival in the Service having been briefly exposed to the former’s lectures during a six month stint at Greenwich in 1882.¹⁰⁷ Respectively commanding the 27-knot destroyer *Janus* and torpedo-gunboat *Renard* in the Channel Squadron from 1895 to 1897, Ballard was obviously familiar with aspects of the strategy

¹⁰⁵ “General Aspect of the Naval Bases Viewed Strategically.”, France and Corsica. (Including Naval Bases, and Commercial and Torpedo-Boat Ports.) Coast Defences &c., 1896 (Revised), NID Report No. 405, May 1896, ADM 231/25.

¹⁰⁶ Ropp, pp. 311-2; Great Britain, Laws, Statutes, etc., *Naval Works Act, 1896*, 59 Vict., c.6.

¹⁰⁷ Lambert, p. 52-3; Admiral Sir George Ballard, “Admiral Ballard’s Memoirs, Part Four”, *The Mariner’s Mirror*, Volume 62 (1976), pp. 249-50.

against French northern bases.¹⁰⁸ His 1897 RUSI Gold Medal Prize Essay, “The Protection of Commerce During War”, brought the blockade and commerce protection themes together under a single system and codified the central tenets of the Admiralty’s offensive strategy against the Dual Alliance.

Ballard recognised that the 1888-9 Manoeuvres had shown that a “perfect” blockade was impossible and that the escape of individual enemy vessels intent on a *guerre de course* was a likelihood. Blockade, however, was still a viable strategy. His system to protect British seaborne commerce was twofold: offensive, involving the “observational” blockade or “masking” of French bases and torpedo stations by the seizure of islands as advanced bases; defensive, with commerce protection ensured by intensive cruiser patrols of the inbound-outbound North Atlantic, South Atlantic, Gibraltar, and Azores trade routes. A powerful British cruiser reserve stationed at Plymouth would deal with their Franco-Russian contemporaries that slipped past the blockades. Another component involved closing, “without a great display of force”, the Mediterranean and Baltic. By “sealing” both seas, Russia was removed from the equation and France limited to its Channel and Atlantic ports which were under observational blockade.¹⁰⁹ Ballard’s proposals to “seal in” the Baltic and related aspects of his paper would re-emerge in Admiralty war plans nearly a decade later.

As the crux of Ballard’s commerce protection system, observational blockades were contingent on the advanced base theory. Masking Cherbourg, Lorient, Brest, and torpedo stations at Dunkerque and Calais required “the utmost possible vigilance” to prevent the breakout of French cruisers and torpedo-craft. Out of 129 British cruisers, torpedo-gunboats, and destroyers involved, only the inshore squadrons watching Dunkerque, Calais, and Havre would use Dover and Portsmouth. For a Cherbourg blockade, a larger squadron would use Alderney as an advanced base. As in the past, the

¹⁰⁸ G.A. Ballard, *The Black Battlefleet*, (Lymington and Greenwich, 1980), pp. 7, 9; Obituary, Admiral G.A. Ballard, *The Times* (early edition), 28. 9. 1948.

¹⁰⁹ G. A. Ballard, Gold Medal Prize Essay 1897, “The Protection of Commerce During War”, *JRUSI*, Volume XLII., April 1898, No. 242, pp. 366-86.

blockade of Brest was “an undertaking of the utmost importance” due to the presence of large French cruisers, making the task of any British blockading squadron, “a very onerous duty to perform.” To facilitate a “watch” on Brest and Lorient, Ushant and Isle de Groix would be seized as secondary advanced flotilla bases for the blockading forces. Submarine telegraph cables would be run between the two islands to Plymouth to coordinate the blockades and communicate French movements. Destroyer flotillas based at St. Helier on Jersey would cover estuaries on the northern Brittany coast. Ballard also proposed blocking the Gironde estuary, twelve miles north of Bordeaux, with mines and sunken hulks so it could not be used by smaller French cruisers.¹¹⁰ This “blocking” provision too, would reappear in later Admiralty plans.

If the Dual Alliance concentrated their principle forces in the Mediterranean, Ballard advocated closing the Straits of Gibraltar, the Suez Canal, and a dual cordon cruiser “watch” on the Dardanelles. Since a Toulon blockade was too risky, the Balearic Islands would be taken as advanced observation points to warn of a French fleet sortie towards Gibraltar--a scenario reminiscent of Bridge’s and Colomb’s 1890 Minorca plan. French torpedo-boat stations at Algiers and Bizerta would be blockaded through the seizure of the Habibas Islands west of Algiers and Zembra Island as secondary bases to Gibraltar. Two separate groups of 26 British cruisers would maintain the Gibraltar cordon and patrol the main commercial route in addition to supporting the British fleet. A force of 8 cruisers, 10 destroyers, and 6 torpedo-boats disposed on narrow lines in the Belts, Sound, and Kattegat, would close the Baltic exits to any Russian cruisers intent on commerce raiding.¹¹¹ Demonstrating that an observational blockade was feasible with advanced island bases off an enemy’s ports, Ballard was the first to mould the various strategic themes bandied about since the late 1880's into a solid, coherent plan. The impact of his proposals were felt immediately. The French back-down over Fashoda in July-November 1898 was motivated not only by the lack of a definitive campaign plan

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 386-93 and **Appendix**, pp. 401-05.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 393-401.

and *matériel*/organisational difficulties within the French Navy, but its inability to effectively counter the Admiralty's main strategy, which closely matched Ballard's blockade provisions for France's northern ports. The French, impressed by the Royal Navy's "new" strategy, labelled it the *système Ballard*.¹¹²

This observational blockade system was the Admiralty's *de facto* strategy by 1902-04, as revealed in: manoeuvres, Fleet War Orders/plans, the organisation/dispositions of British home flotillas, and procurement. A renewed emphasis on the French fleet's efficiency, commerce destruction, and the torpedo-craft of the *défenses mobiles* under the Lanessan Ministry of Marine (1899-1902) prompted the NID, now under Custance, to re-examine the "close" blockade strategy.¹¹³ Like Bridge, Custance advocated the offensive "hunting and catching" approach to the French torpedo threat as defined in manoeuvres during the 1890's.¹¹⁴ With the French re-emphasizing the torpedo-craft's role against a British blockading fleet, the manoeuvres/exercises designed by the NID throughout 1900-02 measured the projected "watch" on French bases and the *défenses mobiles* effectiveness against the strategic system detailed in Ballard's paper. While the 1900 Manoeuvres examined another disputed "command of the sea" scenario, its secondary object was meant to discern the suitable distance to establish a "temporary" base for squadrons "watching" a hostile fortified port. Neither objective was met, although the evolutions showed that cruisers had "a very considerable power" in hunting down enemy torpedo craft. A key suggestion by the Umpires and the "B" Fleet commander, Rear-Admiral Sir G. Noel, was that in future, destroyer flotillas should be closely supported by cruisers--a recommendation essential to the organisation of any inshore blockading squadron.¹¹⁵

During late July-early August 1901 combined Home Fleet Manoeuvres,

¹¹² Ropp, pp. 306-8, 310, 318-23; *Anatomy*, pp. 324-33.

¹¹³ Ropp, pp. 326-36, 341-7.

¹¹⁴ Allen, "Custance", pp. 60, 64-6,

¹¹⁵ Naval Manoeuvres 1900, NID Report no. 596, November 1900, ADM 231/32.

Alderney, Guernsey, and the Scillies served as fortified bases for detachments of “X” Fleet (Channel) under Vice-Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson. Based on the northern Irish coast, Wilson’s objective was to secure the English Channel and prevent Noel’s “B” Fleet (Reserve) from attaining the same end. Noel maintained a “close watch” on Alderney, but was defeated when Wilson raised the blockade by attacking “B’s” blockading squadrons. It has been claimed that this proved the ineffectiveness of a close blockade unless all an enemy’s ships were contained.¹¹⁶ Noel, however, was at a distinct disadvantage in fighting power and speed given the composition of his fleet, old Reserve ironclads (i.e., *Admiral* and *Trafalgar* Classes), when compared to Wilson’s “X” Fleet comprised of modern *Majestic* Class battleships. Moreover, during the “engagements” opportunities for torpedo-craft attacks on a battle fleet proved inconclusive.¹¹⁷ It is unlikely that had their roles been reversed, “B” Fleet would have raised the Channel Islands’ blockade. The exercises highlighted the vulnerability of any French fleet counter-blockading British flotillas in the Channel Islands to a decisive defeat by the Channel Squadron. Indirectly, the scenario indicated one advantage of an observational blockade on Cherbourg.

Along with the 1888 and 1901 Manoeuvres, the September 1902 Combined Mediterranean and Channel Squadron Manoeuvres purportedly demonstrated the impossibility of a “close” blockade under modern conditions.¹¹⁸ The exercise’s “special” object would assess: “what risks are involved in keeping such a close watch on a fleet in a defended port, as to ensure bringing it to action if it issues therefrom.” Two British Fleets, “A” (Mediterranean) commanded by Admiral Sir Compton Domville, and “B” (Channel) under Wilson, would blockade “X” Fleet (French) under the command of Captain Prince Louis Battenberg at the port of Argostoli on Cephalonia, which represented Toulon. Kos and Sardinia respectively depicted Malta and Gibraltar. On the

¹¹⁶ Partridge, “Close Blockade”, pp. 127-8.

¹¹⁷ Naval Manoeuvres 1901, NID Report, No. 641, November 1901, ADM 231/35.

¹¹⁸ Partridge, pp. 128-30; *Anatomy*, pp. 368-70.

night of 5-6 October, Battenberg's cruisers escaped as part of a deliberate feint to draw "B's" forces off the blockade. Taking the bait, Wilson's cruisers left their pickets in pursuit but could not return in time to prevent the break-out of "X's" battleships. Prince Louis thus obtained his object without serious loss or interference. For the Sea Lords, the outcome of the manoeuvres had apparently indicated:

1. That the difficulty already recognized in maintaining the close blockade of a port furnished with torpedo-boats and destroyers is fully corroborated, even when the blockading force is respect of cruisers and destroyers far superior.
2. The advantage possessed by the blockaded force in taking the offensive against the blockaders by their power of concentration for attack, and in choosing their time and mode of making it.
3. The comparative ease with which the blockaded force evaded the enemy's system of lookout and attained their purpose of escape.
4. The difficulty that was experienced by the blockading cruisers and destroyers in communicating to each other and the Commander-in-Chief the news of the escape of X Fleet after it had become known to them.¹¹⁹

Despite Battenberg's escape and the Board's conclusions, the alleged "end" of the close blockade was not clear-cut.

If anything, the "Argostoli" exercise demonstrated that the old "sealing-up" category of close blockade circa 1888-9 was obsolete, not the newer observational strategy gradually developed throughout the 1890's and codified in 1897. The design, and thus the results, of the 1902 Mediterranean manoeuvres were not representative of the advanced base-offensive "watch" system off the French northern and Mediterranean ports as elaborated by Ballard. The scenario actually proved that Ballard's earlier recommendation not to blockade Toulon but to establish an observational base in the Balearics was correct. Strategic war games conducted at the Naval College between January and May 1902 also suggested that a British Mediterranean blockade strategy against Bizerta and Oran would be unsuccessful. Neither "game", however, contained provisions for advanced bases or cruiser patrols as outlined in the observational strategy. Like the "Argostoli" exercise, the blockade's failure in these simulations proved that the

¹¹⁹ Report on the Combined manoeuvres of the Mediterranean, Channel, and Cruiser Squadrons. 1902, NID Report No. 690., May 1903, ADM 231/37; Kerr, *Battenberg*, pp. 153-6.

“Three Admirals” recommendations for a 5 to 3 ratio of blockaders to blockaded was correct, not necessarily that a “watch” on the enemy’s base itself was infeasible.¹²⁰ In another October 1903 Naval College scenario simulating a Mediterranean campaign between Britain and the Dual Alliance, “fear of the torpedo exercised a most important influence” in preventing the British from observing enemy ports. Ironically, the game alluded to the need for advanced coaling bases for flotillas operating on an enemy’s coast. The overall realism of these “blockade” and “evasion” simulations was questionable as the War Course Director, Rear-Admiral Henry May, dismissed them as: “of no use whatever in familiarising us with the conditions of a prolonged naval war.”¹²¹ The close blockade’s “demise” even worked its way into an NID report on the 1902 French Naval Manoeuvres which concluded that: “the blockade of a port defended by torpedo boats and submarines is almost impossible.”¹²² Months before the “Argostoli” exercise, the observational blockade, *vis a vis* Ballard’s provisions, had already been confirmed as the Admiralty’s primary strategy in a potential war with France.

April and July 1902 War Orders issued to the C-in-C Home Fleet outlined the fleet’s duties in the event of a war with France. His principal responsibilities were: (1) Watching the French fleet and bringing it to action if it sortied; (2) Preventing the junction of the Russian Baltic and French Northern Fleets; (3) Defeating any French attempt to take the Channel Islands; (4) Capturing or destroying French cruisers leaving Channel and Biscay ports. The defence of Alderney and Guernsey and assembly of Home Fleet flotillas/cruisers at Portsmouth, Plymouth, and Portland to await Admiralty orders to “observe” the enemy connoted an offensive “watch” on French northern bases utilising advanced bases. Since the “assembly of a large number of French cruisers in their

¹²⁰ Strategical War Games carried out at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich. January to May 1902., NID Report No. 675, November 1902, ADM 231/37.

¹²¹ “Strategical War game carried out at Royal Naval College, Greenwich, in the early part of 1903.”, October 1903, NID Report No. 706, ADM 231/38. Partridge, pp. 130-1 omits May’s dismissal of the game’s practicality.

¹²² Foreign Naval Manoeuvres, 1902. II. France., NID Report, No. 692, June 1903, pp. 37-67 at p. 52, ADM 231/37.

northern ports indicated that their intention was to attack British trade.”, the orders stipulated that a “fast and powerful” squadron of British cruisers be concentrated in the Channel approaches. This repeated Ballard’s 1897 recommendation that a similar squadron be stationed at Portsmouth to intercept French cruisers that slipped past the blockades. The Home Fleet would be positioned so that it could deal with the French Northern Squadron if it sortied--possibly against British blockading squadrons as intimated in the 1901 Manoeuvres.¹²³

The NID confirmed that an observational blockade off French bases was the plan communicated in the War Orders. In a December 1903 report on French coastal defences, the department advocated a “watch” on France’s Atlantic and Channel bases as the most effective means to destroy the French fleet by preventing the junction of its various squadrons. While the *défenses mobiles* and submarines might cause the blockading fleet to keep its distance, they did not preclude operations off an enemy’s base nor prevent the blockaders from curtailing a French sortie. The “chief difficulties” lay in supplying the blockading squadrons which could be solved by the establishment of “extemporary bases” near “the sphere of action”, (i.e.) Cherbourg, Brest, and Lorient. Interference from French flotillas was viewed as negligible.¹²⁴ It was not coincidental that Ballard’s appointment to the NID’s War Division in January 1902 predated both the War Orders and the report on France’s northern naval defences.¹²⁵

By early 1904, the reorganisation of British home flotillas indicated that their initial wartime deployment would be in inshore squadrons off the French northern bases. Replacing Custance as DNI in October 1902, Battenberg restructured flotilla

¹²³ “War Orders 1902”, “M” Branch to DNI, April 18; “M” Branch to DNI, July 3, 1902, “Orders for the Home Fleet upon Mobilisation for War.”, ADM 116/900B, 1889-1907 War Orders, Case 640.

¹²⁴ “France. Coastal Defences. Volume 1.-Channel and Atlantic, 1903.”, December 1903., NID Report No.688., “General Remarks on Blockade”, pp. 8-9, ADM 231/37.

¹²⁵ *The Navy List*, January & April, 1902, (London: HMSO, 1901-02), “Admiralty-Naval Intelligence Department.”

arrangements to conform to the Admiralty's strategic policy. In May 1904 he argued that a preliminary organisation was needed so that on receipt of the "Warning Telegraph", destroyer/gunboat flotillas could "automatically" move to "selected strategic points" to begin operations. Under the C-in-C Home Fleet's existing arrangements, flotillas were scattered amongst half a dozen ports and wholly contingent on his directions. Battenberg recommended that an "Order of Assembly" be instituted for flotillas to concentrate at Portland, Devonport, and Harwich. The underlying purpose of this distribution facilitated the rapid concentration of inshore squadrons for a war with France, Germany, or both.¹²⁶

Verification of these arrangements came in a 4th July paper by the DNI entitled, "The Organisation for War of Torpedo Craft in Home Waters." Dealing with a possible war against either France or Germany, the document constituted, in effect, the NID's first real "war plan" and mirrored the observational blockade/advanced base themes advanced by Ballard in 1897. Assuming a war against France, three separate formations comprising the new *Scout* Class cruisers, torpedo-gunboats, and destroyer flotillas would be based at Falmouth, Portland, and Dover. These inshore squadrons would conduct a close "watch" of French naval units at Brest, Cherbourg, and Dunkirk. A further provision for Ushant's seizure as an advanced base for the Falmouth flotilla was included since their base was nearly 150 miles from Brest.¹²⁷ Drafted by Battenberg, the Ushant option disclosed that the plan's authorship lay with the NID's War Division and its new Director, Ballard, who had been promoted to Captain and Assistant DNI in December 1903.¹²⁸ Confirming that the basic tenets of the *système Ballard* were at the core of the Admiralty's strategic policy against France, the plan's flexibility meant that, with slight

¹²⁶ "Torpedo Craft and Torpedo Gunboats-Disposal of on receipt of 'Warning Telegram'.. C-in-C Home Fleet to Admiralty, April 14, 1904. Remarks by the DNI, May 4, 1904 and DNI, "Revision of Arrangements for the constitution and concentration of Torpedo Craft Flotillas in War.", March 9, 1905, ADM 1/7725, From Admirals "D" Home Fleet, 1904.

¹²⁷ "The Organisation of Torpedo Craft in Home Waters.", DNI, Battenberg, July 4, 1904 (Amended in August), *Naval Necessities. Volume II., 1905*, ADM 116/3093, pp. 509-19.

¹²⁸ Ballard, "Record of Business Letters &c.", Entry for 31. 12. 1903., Ballard MSS, MS80/200, NMM.

modifications, it was equally applicable to Germany.

Home Fleet torpedo-craft manoeuvres in mid-August 1904 tested the NID's July plan and validated that the Admiralty's strategic policy in a war remained a close watch on French or German bases. Conducted in the Irish Sea, the exercise simulated a superior British fleet (*Blue*), supported by strong destroyer flotillas, operating near powerful enemy torpedo flotillas (*Red*): a scenario conforming to an observational blockade off either the French northern bases, the Elbe estuary, or in the vicinity of the Skaw. The manoeuvres' "special object" was: "to ascertain as far as possible the extent of the danger which threatens a fleet compelled by strategical exigencies to move within the radius of action of strong hostile torpedo craft flotillas....". *Blue* battle squadron would attempt to retain its freedom of action with minimal loss while *Red* flotillas aimed at destroying as many *Blue* ships as possible. Another option open to *Blue* involved seizing the Scillies as an advanced base to support operations off *Red*'s main bases at Loch Ryan, Milford Haven, and Falmouth. Remaining virtually unscathed, *Blue* sustained a corresponding heavy loss in destroyers which still indicated that a fleet could successfully defend itself against attacks by enemy torpedo-craft off their bases. The presence of *Red* submarines off Milford Haven, however, made a "close" blockade by *Blue* "more difficult" and caused "fear" that additional enemy submarines lay in wait at *Blue*'s base at Queenstown. Rear-Admiral C.G. Robinson, C-in-C *Red*, observed that close blockade under such conditions was impossible. Although the period of "hostilities" was too short to conclusively demonstrate the dangers of fleet operations near enemy flotillas, a fleet could not be adequately covered by its own destroyers since hostile torpedo craft could not be effectively contained at night.¹²⁹

For some, these manoeuvres are final proof that the close blockade and observation of an enemy's ports was extinct.¹³⁰ A strong counter-argument, however, can be made from the fleet War Orders, flotilla organisation/deployment, and even the 1900-

¹²⁹ British Torpedo Craft Manoeuvres, 1904, December 1904, NID Report No. 754, ADM 231/43.

¹³⁰ *Anatomy*, pp. 367-70; Partridge, pp. 130-32.

04 manoeuvres themselves. Given his experience as the “French” commander during the “Argostoli” exercise, Battenberg, of all senior officers at the Admiralty, should have been the fiercest critic of a blockade strategy. By summer 1904, the DNI challenged the notion that a blockade of hostile ports was dead. Battenberg believed that not only were remarks on previous British manoeuvres exaggerated, recent actions off Port Arthur in the Russo-Japanese War had not yet proven the superiority of blockaded torpedo flotillas against a fleet engaged in a close watch on an adversary’s bases.¹³¹ Apart from Robinson’s remarks, the very implementation of the August 1904 Torpedo Manoeuvres to test the NID’s July war plan indicated that the observational blockade was the cornerstone of the Admiralty’s strategic preparations against France.

Overlooked or misinterpreted by historians examining the blockade concept during the 1888-1904 period is procurement’s habitual role as an extension of the Admiralty’s strategy and its inter-relationship with other factors, especially manoeuvres.¹³² Sustaining an inshore watch off an enemy’s base was greatly enhanced by the evolution of the torpedo-gunboat into the *Scout* Class cruisers and 27-30 *knotters* into the *River* Class destroyers after 1902. The *Scout* concept originated with Vice-Admiral C.C.P. Fitzgerald around 1901. In an Institute of Naval Architects paper, he argued that a small, fast cruiser with good sea keeping qualities and endurance was required to support destroyers on the inshore watch of an enemy’s ports.¹³³ Criticised as too small and expensive, the Admiralty nonetheless issued specifications for a new vessel in 1902-03 which owed much to Fitzgerald’s conception. An “intermediate” between the destroyer and the cruiser, *Scouts* were larger derivatives of the torpedo-gunboat designed to fulfill the same role as flotilla supports for attacks on enemy

¹³¹ *Anatomy*, p. 369, footnote # 24; J. S. Corbett, *Maritime Operations in the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905, Volume One*, (Annapolis, 1994 reprint), pp. 169-71, 178-9, 185-6, 214-16, 222-27, 232-40, 292-3, 298-309, 358-62.

¹³² Refer to footnotes 99-100, 130 above.

¹³³ Vice-Admiral C.C.P. Fitzgerald, “A Design for a Fast Scout”, *Transactions of the Institute of Naval Architects*, London Spring 1901.

torpedo-craft—entailing operations off French bases. Eight *Scouts* were provided for in the 1902-03, 1903-04 Estimates with four pairs laid down between 1903-04 and completed by 1905. In early service, the new *Scouts* proved excellent sea-boats in all weather conditions due to their high forecastles and were more than capable of “running down” destroyers, excepting 30-knot boats in a flat calm. Weaknesses with the Admiralty’s original design specifications included light armament and smaller displacement/coal storage which reduced endurance. Re-armed in 1911-12 with heavier guns, the *Scouts* were successful in their intended role and served as models for a further evolution of the light cruiser-type after 1905.¹³⁴

The destroyer type first suggested by Bridge in 1894 was realised with the completion of the 35 vessel *River* Class in 1904-05--the first significant evolution of the type into the modern destroyer. Experience with earlier destroyers had shown their 30-knot trial speed could not be met due to their low freeboard which limited their speed in a seaway, especially in poor weather. This, combined with their small size and light construction, reduced their overall effectiveness as fighting vessels under all conditions. Influenced by the performance of the German *S90* Class, the Admiralty issued specifications for a larger, more seaworthy boat. Although the *Rivers* only had a contract speed of 25-knots, their higher freeboard and larger displacement meant that their sea-going qualities, endurance, and ability to maintain speed in all weather conditions was significantly better than the 27-30 *knotters*. The *Rivers* enhanced sea keeping qualities meant that their forward guns could be worked under adverse conditions.¹³⁵ These attributes also realised the destroyer requirements Ballard had recommended as a vital

¹³⁴ C.C.P. Fitzgerald, “The New Scouts”, *Transactions of the INA*, April 4, 1906, pp. 1-8, 14-18; D.K. Brown, *Warrior to Dreadnought*, (London, 1997), pp. 163-4; Jane, *British Battle Fleet*, pp. 127-8; *Conway’s, 1860-1905*, pp.84-5. The Admiralty’s Ships Covers at the Brass Foundry, Woolwich were also consulted: ADM 138/189 A-B, Fleet Scouts. *Adventure, Forward, Pathfinder, Sentinel* Classes. Proof that the *Scouts* were still able to hold their own in 1910 against their successors, the *Boadicea* Class light cruisers, can be found in: Commodore (T), E. Charlton to Admiralty, March 13, 1910, No. 51/10/3, ADM 138/189B.

¹³⁵ Ships Covers, ADM 138/184a and 184b-e, *River* Class Destroyers, Woolwich; Brown, *Warrior*, pp. 193-5; Jane, pp. 129-30; Gardiner (ed), *Conway’s, 1860-1905*, pp. 87, 99-100.

“adjunct” to any blockading fleet in his second RUSI Gold Medal essay from 1899.¹³⁶

Confirmation of the *River* Class’s suitability for an observational blockade off enemy bases came during the very manoeuvres touted as verifying the “end” of the close blockade.¹³⁷ Ostensibly, the “Special Object” of the August 1904 Torpedo Craft Manoeuvres was to test a fleet’s ability to protect itself in a close watch on an enemy port defended by flotillas. The other main purpose of the exercise, however, was to test the behaviour and anti-torpedo capabilities of the new *River* Class in comparison to the older *30-knotters*.¹³⁸ Attached to *Blue* Fleet (British), the *Rivers* proved themselves markedly superior to the older boats in overall efficiency, sea keeping, endurance, and speed. Reports from Captain (D) E. Charlton, and the commanders of the six *Rivers* attached to *Blue* during the manoeuvres, praised the newer destroyers’ performance over the older boats, especially their all-weather, anti-torpedo-boat capabilities.¹³⁹ The *Rivers*’ superiority over the earlier destroyers in sea-going characteristics and endurance in the manoeuvres, (procurement) vindicated the feasibility of the very strategy again under examination--an “observational” blockade. The exercise confirmed that the Navy possessed even better “kit” to do the job. The new destroyers, *Scouts*, and advanced bases were all an integral part of the Admiralty’s plan for an inshore “watch” off France’s northern bases aimed at the elimination of the French fleet and *guerre de course* threat to Britain’s overseas commerce. Substantiated by the historical/theoretical work

¹³⁶ G.A. Ballard, Gold Medal Prize Essay (1899), “Considering the Changes made in Naval Construction During the Past Twenty Years, and in View of the Experience Gained During the China-Japanese and Spanish-American Wars, What Are the Best Types of War Vessels for the British Navy, Including Armour, Armament, and General Equipment for Ships of all Types?”, *JRUSI*. Volume XLIV, April 1900., No. 266., pp. 359-394 at 360, 391-92.

¹³⁷ Refer to footnote 129, above.

¹³⁸ “River” Type and 30 knotters, Comparison between., Admiralty to C-in-C Home Fleet, (Vice-Admiral Sir A.K. Wilson), July 16, 1904., CN.1.13532., p. 114, ADM 144/19. Admiralty: Channel Squadron and Fleet: Correspondence, 1867-1907. Destroyers and Torpedo Boats, May 1903-June 1907.

¹³⁹ “River” Type and 30 knotters, Comparison between. Captain (D) E. Charlton, HMS *Halcyon* at Portland to C-in-C Home Fleet, August 24, 1904, pp. 115-24, and reports by destroyer commanders, *passim*, pp. 124-42, ADM 144/19.

of Laughton and Colomb in the late 1880's-1890's. developed by the NID through manoeuvres from 1888 on, and codified by Ballard and the DNI's after 1897, this strategy likewise formed the basis of planning against Britain's newest naval rival by 1904.

Chapter Two: Early Planning Against Germany, 1902-1906.

I.

Between 1892 and 1905, the Admiralty focussed on the threat posed by the Dual Alliance navies. Through annual fleet manoeuvres, exercises, and academic debates, a particular “doctrine” or strategy had emerged to deal with the Franco-Russian fleets. The Royal Navy’s “strategists” proposed a close “watch” on, and direct attacks against, an adversary’s main bases as the most expedient method to destroy an enemy fleet while protecting British seaborne trade. Weaknesses in this strategy led to the adoption of the advanced base concept as a viable component in the successful blockade of enemy ports. Coupled with new, more seaworthy vessels for inshore squadrons, the observational blockade strategy was a reality by 1902. Even with the gradual dissipation of the Dual Alliance threat after 1904-05, these strategic themes were continued as Britain prepared to meet the new naval challenge posed by Germany.

By 1901-02, the Admiralty was attentive to the rapid growth of the Kaiser’s *riskflotte* and its underlying *raison d’être*, especially after the Reichstag endorsement of Grand Admiral Tirpitz’s Second Naval Bill in 1900. Despite a lessening of Britain’s Far Eastern commitments by the January 1902 Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the NID began to carefully monitor the rise of the German fleet alongside the Dual Alliance threat. Over the next four years, planning for a possible naval war with Germany increased dramatically and resulted in the creation of the Admiralty’s first ever “official” war plans. Despite this development, there has been no comprehensive examination of the Admiralty’s early war planning against Germany, apart from Arthur Marder’s study of pre-1906 British naval policy.¹ Some historians have even argued that there was a gap in Admiralty war planning during this period because, “the stimulus of a crisis in international affairs” was lacking.² A closer evaluation of primary and secondary sources

¹ *Anatomy*, pp. 456-67, 475-82, 489-511.

² Haggie, “War Planning”, p. 120.



demonstrates that this was not the case. The creation of strategic contingencies in the Fisher administration's early years were the direct result of tensions in European and international affairs. The diplomatic/strategic upheavals caused by the Anglo-French Entente, Russo-Japanese War, Norwegian independence from Sweden, and the first Moroccan Crisis (March 1905-April 1906), shaped the Admiralty's planning and shifted its strategic inclinations towards the North Sea. The plans were variations, if not continuations, of themes examined since 1887. The same strategic axioms behind war preparations against France and Russia--including economic warfare and deterrence--re-emerged in stratagems against a new target: Wilhelmine Germany.

The NID's North Sea studies and contributions from C-in-C's afloat throughout 1902-06, did not merely repeat contingencies developed to meet the Dual Alliance, but were specifically adapted to the conditions of a naval war with Germany. These designs aimed at utilising the Navy's offensive potential to threaten or attack an enemy's vulnerable points. Admiralty planning during the Moroccan Crisis sought better inter-service cooperation for large-scale amphibious operations against key targets. Inter-service rivalry, divergent priorities, and the British Army's quest for a more independent role, however, marred the emergence of the Navy's amphibious schemes as Britain's national strategy. Based on sound principles and experience, the Admiralty's war plans remained, nonetheless, highly innovative and informed.

British naval planning against Germany centred on offensive, inshore, observational blockade and combined operations along the North Sea and Baltic littorals. These were the only areas where the Royal Navy could exert direct pressure on Germany via the destruction of her fleet, ports, and seaborne trade, then the second largest in the world behind Britain. The Baltic balance of power and the status of its entrances became priorities once German diplomacy attempted to restrict British access to the region throughout 1905-08. Plans developed between 1902 and 1906 were not "Schlieffen-type" preventative strike contingencies but were portrayed as such to moderate Germany's aggressive foreign policy. While Fisher's pronouncements about sweeping down on the German Fleet were carefully amplified theatrics, the plans behind

his threats were not. Like previous contingencies aimed at countering the Dual Alliance, the Admiralty's early war plans against Germany were realistic appraisals reflecting Britain's traditional use of sea power as offensive intent against an enemy fleet and the jugulars of its most strategically vulnerable areas. Just as Brest, Cherbourg, Toulon, Bizerta, and the Dardanelles were the focus of British naval planning during the Franco-Russian rivalry: Kiel, the Canal, Schleswig Holstein, Heligoland, Wilhelmshaven, Cuxhaven, and the Baltic entrances became the Royal Navy's new strategic targets by 1904.

II.

While the Admiralty's attention concentrated on the Dual Alliance and the increased efficiency of the French fleets under the Lanessan Ministry of Marine (1899-1902), Germany's fleet expansion was also attracting concern by late 1901. The German Naval Bills of 1898 and 1900 had not gone unnoticed. The First Lord, Lord Selborne, alluded to Germany's "definite" and "persistent" naval policy and Wilhelm II's determination to use the fleet's "power" to push German interests all over the world. The Tirpitz Plan's hidden intent was not lost on Selborne. German naval policy was clearly directed against Britain:

Of necessity it follows that the German naval strength must be raised so as to compare more advantageously than at present with ours. The result of this policy will be to place Germany in a commanding position if ever we find ourselves at war with France and Russia, and at the same time to put the Triple Alliance in a different relative position to France and Russia in respect of naval strength to that which it has hitherto occupied.³

Suspicious about German naval aspirations originated with the NID and its Director, Captain Reginald N. Custance. By 1900, the department had concluded that Germany was Britain's most probable future enemy.⁴ In mid September 1901, Custance

³ Lord Selborne, "The Navy's Estimates and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Memorandum on the Growth of Expenditure", 16 November, 1901, in D. G. Boyce (ed), *The Crisis of British Power: The Imperial and Naval Papers of the Second Earl of Selborne, 1895-1910*, (London, 1990), p. 136.

⁴ *Anatomy*, p. 463.

lobbied for the Home Fleet's frequent exercise so it could be, "on a par with the formidable German force which is being rapidly developed in the North Sea." Considered premature by Selborne and the First Naval (Sea) Lord (1899-1904), Admiral Lord Walter Kerr, Custance's evaluation of the 1901 Manoeuvres recommended a greater home fleet concentration to counter the French Northern Fleet and cover the uncertain position of Germany.⁵ By 1902, the Admiralty was convinced that the High Seas Fleet was being specifically built for a war with Britain. In October, the First Lord expressed his concern over the restricted cruising radius and cramped crew quarters of German battleships which indicated that they were designed exclusively for the North Sea.⁶ Some, however, disagree with standard interpretations of Admiralty concerns over the German fleet and attribute continued British naval expenditure to the Franco-Russian threat.⁷

Rudimentary Admiralty preparation for war with Germany began in April-May, 1902. Unconvinced that Wilhelm II was building his fleet solely against Britain, Kerr, nonetheless, added the German "factor" into strategic dispositions in home waters and the suitability of East Coast bases. In late April 1902, he instructed Custance to outline the existing strategic situation in the North Sea, including reference to Germany.⁸ The DNI welcomed the request to air his contention that the Navy alter its concentrations due to the High Seas Fleet's growth. In a May 1902 letter to Cyprian Bridge, then C-in-C China Station, Custance wrote, "We [NID] are getting on a little. After pounding away for a long time the German menace has been at least brought partially home, and I am sanguine about its being completed so. One of the questions which has been

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 463-64; Allen, "Custance", p. 70. Also: ADM 116/900B, "1889-1907 War Orders".

⁶ Marder, *Anatomy*, p. 464 and *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904-1919, Volume I, The Road to War, 1904-1914*, (London, 1961), p. 107. (Hereafter referred to as, *FDSF v.1.*)

⁷ N. Lambert, *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution*, (Columbia, SC, 1999), pp. 4-6; Sumida, *In Defence*, pp. 20-1, 23-4.

⁸ Kerr to Selborne, 28 April 1902, Boyce, *Crisis*, p. 144.

constantly before me in connection with this was the organisation of the Home Fleet. Between ourselves this has at last been decided on.”⁹

To clarify the Home Fleet’s correct disposition in a war with Germany, Custance engaged the assistance of another NRS colleague: the Director of the Naval War Course, Captain Henry J. May.¹⁰ Between the 1st and 3rd May 1902, a strategical war game was played out at Greenwich. The premise involved a North Sea campaign where British fleets were opposed by combined Russo-German naval forces in the Baltic and North Sea. While the British had the advantage in numbers of armoured ships, the “allies” were superior in speed. The “Allied” strategy included a foray from the Baltic into the North Sea where they divided into a “fast” fleet which moved to raid Scotland and a “slow” fleet moving north along the Norwegian coast. The British split their fleet into comparable divisions with cruiser squadrons watching the northern and southern portions of the North Sea to find and engage the “Allied” fleets. The Southern cruiser squadron was extended from Yarmouth to the Elbe estuary while the Northern squadron covered a line from Kinnaird Head to Bommel Fiord on the Norwegian coast. Although the Allied “fast” fleet carried out an ineffectual raid on Scotland, it was detected by the northern British cruisers. After destroying the “slow” Allied fleet, the “fast” British Fleet (Channel) attempted to engage the fast Allied fleet which escaped intact. The “slow” British fleet achieved nothing in the simulation.

Emphasising the importance of armoured cruisers on the observational lines, the simulation brought out other relevant points for future North Sea operational plans. The lack of defended East Coast ports for North Sea/Baltic operations was a liability, as was ignorance of the Danish and Norwegian coasts. The game’s precis stressed the strategic importance of the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal in any prospective British campaign against the German Fleet: “With regard to the dispositions on either side, the British Admiral was bound, at the outset, to set a watch on the Elbe in case the Allies should debouch

⁹ Custance to Bridge, May 11, 1902, Papers of Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge, BRI/15, NMM.

¹⁰ Refer to Chapter One above; A. Lambert, *Foundations*, pp. 142-43, 196-201, and Appendix, 235-37. Also: Custance to Bridge, October 17, 1902, Bridge MSS, BRI/15, NMM.

from the Kiel Canal.”¹¹ This innocuous evaluation would later become a key factor in future British naval planning against Germany. Operations aimed at containing or destroying the High Seas Fleet would have to include a dual “watch” on both the Elbe and the Skagerrak/Kattegat in conjunction with Baltic excursions.

Kerr’s request to evaluate the North Sea strategic situation was examined in some detail by the NID and the War Division’s rising “strategist”: Commander George A. Ballard. Evidence linking Ballard with the “creation” of the Admiralty’s early contingencies came in a paper he prepared to shore up Fisher’s case regarding the war plans issue during the infamous Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) “Beresford Inquiry” in 1909.¹² According to Ballard, Custance approached him with the North Sea strategic question and asked for a memorandum on the subject. This included the recent findings of the War College’s North Sea war game for the brief included, “reference to the development of the German Fleet and completion of the Baltic Canal.” The report revised a study by the former ADNI, Captain Charles J. Briggs in 1901, which reflected aspects examined of the War Course simulation, namely: “the conditions that would arise should the Germans adopt an aggressive attitude at a time when Great Britain was already occupied in a war with France and Russia; an aspect of the general question which had caused some apprehension after the Fasohda Crisis.” The completed memorandum was turned over to Ballard’s immediate superior in the NID’s Defence Division, Captain H.L. Heath, who concurred in its findings and passed it on to the DNI. Custance informed Ballard that the suggestions contained within his report were worthy of further attention. It thus remained in NID and became, “the basis of subsequent papers which came under the notice of Prince Louis of Battenberg and Sir Charles

¹¹ “Précis of North Sea Campaign, May 1902. (Captain H.J. May, August 25, 1902). Strategical Games carried out at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich. January to May 1902.” NID Report No. 675, ADM 231/37.

¹² “Remarks on the Framing of Certain Plans for War With Germany Now at the Admiralty”, G.A. Ballard, May 1909. 10 pp, ADM 1/8997, “War Plans. Historical Statement.” Admiralty 38. 1938.

Ottley....and were in general approved.”¹³ While Ballard’s 1902 North Sea memorandum does not survive,¹⁴ it reflected the same strategic concerns from the War College game, such as the significance of the Kiel Canal, the Baltic, and Germany’s western exits to the North Sea. It too served as a foundation for future NID war plans against Germany throughout 1904-07.

Evidence of Ballard’s work and the May 1902 War College “campaign” can be found in the DNI’s 28th May report to Kerr and Selborne. Custance’s “Memorandum on the strategic position in the North Sea” laid out the proper strategic distribution of British fleets in Home Waters facing a potential Franco-Russian-German naval concentration. Given geographical constraints, Russo-German fleets (Wilhelmshaven) had only two available routes to effect a concentration with the French (Brest) in the North Sea via either the Straits of Dover or “North about”, meaning the Skagerrak/Kattegat. Although there was no direct allusion to the Kiel Canal, Custance observed that if the British Home Fleet(s) remained undefeated, the “Northern Powers” were restricted to the northwestern Baltic egresses. Accordingly, the Home Fleet’s “strategic centre” was in the neighbourhood of the Dover Straits. A powerful British force: “thus centrally placed could be thrown as a whole on to either hostile fleet before the other could arrive to assist it. The two hostile Fleets could not effect a junction without running this risk unless one or both went North about.” To cover the Channel and the East Coast, Custance believed the British Fleet should be concentrated at the Nore to engage any hostile fleet, “before returning to the Weser or passing the Skaw.” Vessels requiring repair could utilise the Thames Dockyards or Channel bases. As it was necessary to keep the Home Fleet concentrated at the Nore, no battleships could be sent to northern British ports as they ran the risk of being cut off from the main body. Instead, the DNI suggested basing a powerful force of cruisers at the Firth of Forth and

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 1-3.

¹⁴ In the case of the NID, there is no complete sequence or digest of records, except the Intelligence Reports and the War Plans scattered throughout ADM 1, ADM 137, ADM 116 and ADM 231. See: A. Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation*, (Oxford, 1989), p. 227.

its development as a base.¹⁵

The DNI's recommendation to base the Home Fleet at the Nore anticipated that a German or combined Russo-German fleet might issue from either the Elbe or Wilhelmshaven instead of the Baltic. Custance's proposal for a fleet concentration in the North Sea and the Forth's value as an East Coast base were based on the War College scenario, Ballard's work in the Department, and his own contention that, "The magnitude of the force which may be required in the North Sea will be practically determined by the power of the German Navy."¹⁶ Orders transmitted to the C-in-C Home Fleet in July 1902 contained the directive that a strong fleet be centrally positioned to prevent the junction of the French and Russian northern fleets. The C-in-C's duties also included: "(ii) to watch the French Fleet and bring it to action, if it puts to sea; (iii) To be prepared to bring to action any Russian ships appearing in the North Sea from the Baltic-be it battleships or cruisers."¹⁷ These orders easily countered the presence of a hostile German fleet. The NID's 1901-02 North Sea studies and their recommendations were later mirrored by policies implemented by Fisher's administration.

Despite amended naval dispositions in Home Waters and concerns over the efficiency of Germany's flotillas, coastal defences, and ordnance by the Admiralty's Parliamentary Secretary, Hugh Arnold-Forster, and the NID, Kerr was unconvinced that an immediate anti-German concentration in the North Sea was required.¹⁸ In principle,

¹⁵ "Memorandum on the strategic position in the North Sea", Captain R.N. Custance, May 28, 1902., in Boyce, *Crisis*, pp. 144-45.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 145.

¹⁷ From Military Branch to DNI Reginald Custance, July 3, 1902, "Orders for the Home Fleet upon Mobilisation for War.", ADM 116/900B, "1889-1907 War Orders", Case #640; *Anatomy*, p. 467, footnote #33.

¹⁸ "Notes on a Visit to Kiel and Wilhelmshaven, August 1902" and "General Remarks on the German Navy and Naval Establishments", H.O. Arnold-Forster, October 18, 1902, (34 pp.), ADM 116/940B, "Anglo-German Relations, 1902-1914"; "Germany. Coast Defences and Defence Ordnance, &c. (Revised.) 1902.", September 1902. NID Report No. 579. (163 pp.), ADM 231/31, Nos. 567-62.

however, he sided with Custance on basing a fleet in the Nore and was supportive of establishing a northern East Coast base in the Firth of Forth.¹⁹ In early 1903, the Admiralty decided to develop Rosyth on the Forth as the main operational base for a potential war with Germany. Aware of the arguments for a North Sea concentration against Germany in 1902 and the establishment of an East Coast base, Fisher, then C-in-C Mediterranean, took interest in Arnold-Forster's August 1902 visit to Kiel and urged the Parliamentary Secretary to print his report on the German Fleet. This sudden attention to Arnold-Forster's and Custance's recommendations for a home re-concentration may have been the paradigm that influenced Fisher's fleet re-distribution policy in late 1904 which brought the bulk of British naval power closer to the North Sea. Rosyth and the East Coast base issue re-emerged during Fisher's administration in his fleet concentration policy and war plans developed in 1905-07. The project, however, languished and was never pushed to completion until well into the First World War.²⁰

Along with the East Coast base issue, Custance's successor as DNI, Captain Prince Louis of Battenberg (November 1902-February 1905), continued to restructure the Home Fleet against Germany. Battenberg's scheme entailed a more homogeneous fleet by allocating battleships and cruisers under Coast Guard assignment to the Home Fleet C-in-C. He also proposed a clearer delineation of command responsibilities between the latter and the C-in-C Coast Guard and Naval Reserves. Another key point of Battenberg's platform followed Custance's recommendations and "lessons" from the War College's May 1902 game to familiarise the Home Fleet with the area of its intended future operations. To enhance its operational effectiveness, "The Home Fleet (was) to cruise in British waters and North Sea (includ. Scandinavia)."²¹

A 20th February 1903 Admiralty announcement heralded the implementation of

¹⁹ Note by Lord Walter Kerr on Custance's memorandum, May 29, 1902, in Boyce, *Crisis*, pp. 146-47. Mackay, *Fisher*, p. 314.

²⁰ *FDSF v. I.*, pp. 216, 421-424; *Anatomy*, pp. 466-67; Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 265, 306-07, 314, 317-18, 337-38, 401.

²¹ Battenberg to King-Hall, December 1, 1902, in Kerr, *Battenberg*, pp. 157-59.

the DNI's suggestions. The release proclaimed that the Home Fleet was becoming a powerful and efficient force through continual cruising and exercise at sea.²² Reiterating the NID's estimations of the North Sea strategic situation, Battenberg's proposals anticipated the Fisher administration's November-December 1904 fleet redistribution scheme, the creation of a "new" Home Fleet in 1906, and Fisher's despatch of the Channel Fleet to cruise Scandinavia waters at the height of the Moroccan Crisis in 1905. The strategic/diplomatic implications of that Baltic cruise will be examined below.

In addition to the Home Fleet issue, studies on combined operations and German fleet manoeuvres in late 1903 influenced Admiralty war plans developed throughout 1904-08. On 24th November 1903, Ballard delivered a paper to the Aldershot Military Society evaluating the future of amphibious operations and planning. The paper stressed lessons from recent overseas conflicts due to the modified strategic requirements caused by modern technology and tactical revolutions on land and sea. Utilising instances from the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 and the Spanish-American War, Ballard argued that successful combined operations were possible with properly coordinated and detailed planning between the two services. He cautioned that these "analogies" did not imply amphibious attacks against Continental powers, "Unless under very exceptional circumstances, it is doubtful if we should attempt to invade the enemy's home territory, and if our existing naval superiority is maintained, it is even more doubtful if they would attempt to invade ours." Again, "under very exceptional circumstances", Ballard thought it unlikely that Britain could invade an enemy's territory with the expressed intent of attacking a fleet at its home base. The examples of the Japanese at Wei-hai-Wei and the Americans at Santiago, however, indicated that the question was still worthy of "serious attention" for it was not unlikely that similar circumstances could be

²² *Anatomy*, p. 467.

encountered.²³ Giving the “green light” to amphibious forays against an enemy’s outlying dependancies, Ballard did not rule out descents on an adversary’s main territory or naval facilities. His contentions foreshadowed future proposals by the NID, Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson, and Fisher throughout 1904-08 for amphibious landings in Schleswig-Holstein, near the Elbe entrance, and Denmark.

NID evaluations of the High Seas Fleets’ 1902-03 naval manoeuvres revealed the feasibility of operations examined in Ballard’s paper such as attacks on an adversary’s main base. The department’s reports noted that while the 1902 Manoeuvres included successful “British” attacks on the mouth of the Elbe and the Kiel Canal’s western exit, the 1903 exercise simulated a direct assault on Kiel harbour. Although a sizable “German” squadron was in the estuary during the British attack in the Elbe scenario, it was annihilated.²⁴ This simulation repeated on a smaller scale the 1900 German Fleet exercises when a “British” attack on the fleet at Cuxhaven resulted in its destruction.²⁵ The significance of three successful “British” attacks on the Imperial Navy’s vulnerable areas was not lost on the German Admiralty Staff nor the NID. Like the May 1902 War College game, the report clarified the high priority targets in a naval war against Germany:

Should Germany be engaged in a Naval War it is clearly a matter of the highest importance for the enemy to seize either the Elbe or Kiel Harbour, for owing to the existence of the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal, these two strategical points are mutually interdependent....The construction of the canal has then clearly made it necessary to strengthen the defences both of Kiel and the mouth of the Elbe, in order to keep the possession of it as long as possible, and to hinder its being

²³ “Naval and Military Co-operation in War”, lecture by Commander G.A. Ballard, NID to Aldershot Military Society, November 24, 1903. *Papers on Naval Subjects, 1903. Volume II.*, pp. 123-47. NID Report No. 701, February 1904. ADM 231/38, Nos. 693-706.

²⁴ “Germany. Naval Manoeuvres, 1903.”, *Foreign Naval Manoeuvres, 1903*. NID Report No.719., pp. 7-19., ADM 231/40, NID Reports 1903-1905, Nos. 716-727.

²⁵ Ivo Nicholai Lambi, *The Navy and German Power Politics, 1862-1914*, (London, 1982), p. 215.

used as a means of communication by an enemy.²⁶

Indicating that Germany was testing the strengths and weaknesses of its strategically vital points, the High Seas Fleet manoeuvres clarified to the Admiralty that the prosecution of a determined attack against those areas had a high probability of success. Through analysis of the German Naval Manoeuvres, the NID had not only had a clearer picture of Germany's North Sea and Baltic defences, they became aware of Kiel, the Elbe estuary, and the Canal's vulnerability to determined assaults. These observations, Ballard's amphibious study, and the NID's North Sea recommendations were harbingers, if not the progenitors, of the Admiralty's offensive planning against Germany in early 1904.

III.

The outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War on 8th February 1904 heightened Admiralty concerns over German naval policy. Besides the diplomatic complications arising from Britain and France's alliance to the principal combatants, early Russian losses in the Far East altered the existing naval balance between the Royal Navy and Dual Alliance fleets. Although the war's outcome was far from decided, the Admiralty revised its estimates of potential adversaries under the Two Power Standard. In late February, Selborne intimated that because of Russian losses at Port Arthur, the standard would be thereafter calculated in reference to France and Germany. The First Lord made it clear that the German fleet was the more serious threat: "the great new German navy is being carefully built up from the point of view of a war with us"

....The more the composition of the new German fleet is examined the clearer it becomes that it is designed for a possible conflict with the British fleet. It cannot be designed for the purpose of playing a leading part in a future war between Germany and France and Russia. The issue of such a war can only be decided by armies on land, and the great naval expenditure on which Germany has embarked involves a deliberate diminution of the military strength which Germany might otherwise have attained in relation to France and Russia.

²⁶ "Germany. Naval Manoeuvres, 1903", NID Report, No. 719, ADM 231/40, Nos. 716-727.

Moreover, the High Seas Fleet's strategic concentration at Kiel and Wilhelmshaven proved Germany's intention of contesting the North Sea with Britain.²⁷ The settlement of Anglo-French colonial enmities, the Far Eastern war, and aggressive German foreign policy placed the German naval "menace" at the forefront of the Admiralty's strategic priorities.

The *Entente Cordiale*'s creation in April 1904 improved Anglo-French relations and lessened British anxieties regarding the French fleets. Strategically, the *Entente* gave the Admiralty the flexibility to concentrate on matters closer to home but did not include a sudden abandonment of policy regarding the French Navy. The possibility remained that Britain and France may become embroiled in the Russo-Japanese conflict on the sides of their respective allies. This uncertainty ensured that French fleet dispositions were factored into Admiralty evaluations until at least mid 1905, even though the immediate fallout from the formation of the Entente had identified Germany as the Royal Navy's future adversary.²⁸

While the *Entente* was not directed against Germany, the twin spectres of "encirclement" and a curtailment of *Weltpolitik* haunted the Wilhelmine hierarchy. The Kaiser viewed the Far Eastern war as the ideal opportunity to form a continental alliance based on a solid understanding with Russia. A *rapprochement* with Nicholas II over the Baltic would eliminate the Dual Alliance's expansion into an anti-German coalition that included Britain. Wilhelm II believed the Russo-Japanese War would weaken both Russia and France, forcing the former into an alliance and the latter to comply with the Russo-German grouping to avoid isolation. Britain, the one power that potentially barred Germany's *Weltpolitik* aspirations, would then be at the mercy of this new continental bloc. The Emperor responded to the Anglo-French understanding by courting Russia and scheming to undermine the new *Entente*. Under Chancellor Bernard

²⁷ "Cabinet Memorandum by Lord Selborne", February 26, 1904, in Boyce, *Crisis*, pp. 170-73.

²⁸ "Naval and Military Policy in the Event of War With France", July, 1905, ADM 116/3111, War Plans for Mediterranean and Channel Fleets based on French Naval Policy, Case # 0093; *Anatomy*, pp. 474-75.

von Bülow and the “Grey Eminence” of the *Auswartiges Amt*, Senior Councillor Friedrich von Holstein, German diplomacy began a precipitous two-year journey where it, “staggered from one crisis to another, teetered on the brink of war with no fewer than three great powers, and permanently antagonised a fourth.”²⁹

By summer 1904, Germany’s foreign and naval policies increased Foreign Office concerns over a possible Russo-German association. Speculation over German motives was compounded by the Hamburg-Amerika Line’s supply of coal to the Russian Baltic Fleet *en route* to the Far East and the Kaiser’s pledge to protect that fleet on its passage through Scandinavian waters.³⁰ Along with these overtures, the German naval threat became the focus of British perception after Edward VII’s state visit to the Kiel regatta in June 1904. Reports from British warships accompanying the King provided the NID with first-hand accounts on the German fleet’s efficiency to complement press reports emphasizing the growing rival in the North Sea.³¹ Within a month, the Admiralty had compiled the first war plan with specific reference to Germany: a plan based the NID’s 1901-03 North Sea studies and proposals dating back to 1888.

In his 4th July paper, “The Organisation for War of Torpedo Craft in Home Waters”, Battenberg outlined the Admiralty’s strategic policy in a war with either France or Germany which included close “watches” on French naval units at Brest, Cherbourg, and Dunkirk.³² Facing Germany, British flotillas would be harder to supply

²⁹ J. Steinberg, “The Copenhagen Complex”, *The Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 1., No. 3., (July 1966), p. 31; J. A. White, *Transition to Global Rivalry: Alliance Diplomacy and the Quadruple Entente, 1895-1907*, (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 99-102; N. Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein: Politics and Diplomacy in the Era of Bismarck and Wilhelm II, Volume II.*, (Cambridge, MA, 1965), pp.678-82.

³⁰ Steinberg, “Copenhagen”, p. 32; Z. Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, (New York, 1977) , p. 30; L. J. Cecil, “Coal for the fleet that had to die”, *American Historical Review*, LXIX, No. 4., (July 1964), pp. 993-1005.

³¹ Reports from HMS *Dido* and *Bedford*: NID Report No. 745, January 1905, *Foreign Naval Affairs, 1904-05*, ADM 231/42, Nos. 740-53; *Anatomy*, pp. 476-79.

³² Refer to Chapter One above, footnote 127.

due to the greater distances between the enemy's ports and home bases. The paucity of suitable advanced bases along the German North Sea littoral was a particular problem as, excepting Heligoland, nearly all the Frisian islands were within artillery range of the coast and could be retaken quite easily. While Heligoland was an obvious choice, its capture was unlikely due to strong defences. Thus, a destroyer watch off the mouth of the Elbe and Wilhelmshaven, would involve operating from British bases. The disadvantage was not prohibitive, even though Harwich was 285 miles from the Elbe, destroyers could rest and economise on coal by anchoring in shallow waters during the day.³³

Maintaining a watch on Kiel, especially the Baltic exit, was more problematic. A vigil on the Canal's western end involved a flotilla off Wilhelmshaven, whereas a close watch on the Baltic side entailed "pushing" a flotilla through the Belts. This required the support of the main fleet and exposed it to German torpedo craft attacks in narrow waters despite British destroyers. The main difficulty, drawn from "previous papers dealing with the subject of a war with Germany", lay in effectively sealing the Canal's Baltic egresses and stopping a German fleet sortie near its principal base. The solution was to block the mouth of the Elbe with sunken hulks during an early phase in the war. Described as "a perfectly feasible operation", it alleviated the problems associated with maintaining a direct watch on Kiel and would:

force the enemy's battleships and cruisers to use the Baltic exit, and simplify the duty of the fleet waiting in the North Sea to engage him. Moreover, it would force him to fight at such a distance from his base that his smaller torpedo boats could not assist him. Lastly, and most important of all. It would compel him to spend a night at sea within reach of our own destroyer flotillas before he engaged. If our fleet was lying somewhere to the westward of the Skaw, say on the Jutland Bank (at anchor if need be), the enemy would have to steam some 250 miles to meet them,...and so his avenue of approach would be known with certainty to our destroyers, he would encounter very serious risks.

The blocking of the Elbe with the German fleet at Kiel was, "a good foundation for our

³³ "The Organisation of Torpedo Craft in Home Waters." DNI, Battenberg, 4 July, 1904 (Amended in August), *Naval Necessities. Volume II.*, 1905. ADM 116/3093, pp. 508-19.

general strategical policy”, for with the main British fleet positioned within thirty miles of the Skaw, it placed the Germans at a disadvantage. German torpedo-craft and main unit effectiveness from Kiel were nullified by destroyers positioned between the Skaw and opposite coasts in support of the British fleet. Without a fixed base, these flotillas could find sheltered anchorages by going east or west of the Skaw, close to the island of Laeso, or along the Swedish coast. The British destroyer force would be divided into two main groups: one at Harwich-Dover watching the North Sea littoral, the other operating with the main fleet as its base of supply near the Skaw. The North Sea flotillas, double the size of the others, would employ large, fast ships since they had to watch the Elbe and Jade for any hostile torpedo craft that circumvented the block ship obstructions, while operating further from their bases. Accordingly, 21 divisions, including the larger *River Class* destroyers, would cover the German North Sea Coast while 11 divisions of *30-Knot* destroyers accompanied the main fleet in the Skaw.³⁴

Drafted by the DNI, the July 1904 war plan was the obvious product of the War Division under Ballard, who had been promoted Assistant DNI in December 1903. There were strong similarities between the Elbe plan and his proposal to obstruct the estuary of the Gironde River with sunken hulks and mines outlined in his 1897 RUSI essay. This paper had also dealt in detail with the British flotilla operations in the Belts, Sound, and Skaw, to prevent Russian cruisers slipping into the North Sea and the establishment of “flying bases” for destroyers on observational duties off an enemy’s ports.³⁵ The August 1904 Torpedo Craft Manoeuvres conformed to the NID’s July plan for an observational blockade of the French northern bases and stressed positioning the main British fleet near the Skaw or in support of a flotilla watch on the Elbe.³⁶ A further examination of the advanced base concept was conducted within Ballard’s division by Royal Marine Artillery Captain Maurice P. A. Hankey.

³⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 512-17.

³⁵ Chapter One above, pp. 34-6, footnotes 109-111.

³⁶ Torpedo Craft Manoeuvres, 1904, December 1904, NID Report No. 754, ADM 231/43 and Chapter One above.

Attached to the NID shortly after Ballard in April 1902, Hankey was employed as the War Division's coastal defence analyst throughout 1902-06.³⁷ His promotion of the Royal Marines as a "rapid response force" envisioned raids and landings on an enemy's coast and harbours to establish advanced bases for a blockading fleet. Based at naval ports and aboard ships, a trained body of Marines could be rapidly despatched to occupy important tactical positions on a hostile coast as a covering force for a larger expedition.³⁸ In early May 1904, Hankey drafted a paper, "Advance Bases for the Fleet", which addressed questions surrounding the maintenance of destroyer "watches" on French and German bases. Islands were the best sites for advanced bases as they could be easily defended by a properly equipped small force. Such operations provided a base near an enemy to avoid detaching vessels a considerable distance for coal, ammunition, and supplies. A Royal Marine force, if provided with quick-firing artillery, searchlights, wireless, and an improvised boom defence, could adequately defend against attempts to retake the island. An advanced base would also facilitate navigation for the fleet and secure a bridgehead for a larger expeditionary force.³⁹ Although not included with the July 1904 war plan, Hankey's study revealed that the advance base concept was examined in considerable detail within the War Division, especially proposals to take Ushant and Heligoland. His proposals, along with the scheme to block the Elbe, would influence further Admiralty war plans after 1904.

The premise that the Elbe could be successfully obstructed was, however, "blown to bits" by the Navy's Hydrographic Department. A 6th July report by the Hydrographer ruled out employing sunken hulks in the estuary as "doomed to failure"

³⁷ For Hankey's employment in the NID's War Division and his work refer to: *The Navy Lists, 1902-1906*, "Naval Intelligence Department"; Lord Hankey, *The Supreme Command, 1914-1918. Volume One*, (London, 1961), pp. 24-5; S. Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets, Volume 1 1877-1918*, (London, 1970), pp. 61-2, 66-7; "Naval Intelligence Department. Distribution of Work-March 1905. War Division.", ADM 231/45, NID Report No. 789.

³⁸ Hankey, *Supreme Command*, v.1., pp. 24-5.

³⁹ "Advance Bases for the Fleet", May 2, 1904, draft by Captain Maurice P.A. Hankey, HNKY 6/3, Hankey Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge.

owing to the Elbe's distance from the sea and the constantly shifting channel comprised of mud and sand flats. Similar doubts were expressed by Kerr and Rear-Admiral Alfred F. Winsloe, commanding torpedo and submarine flotillas, who condemned the scheme as "absolutely impracticable."⁴⁰ Despite these foibles, the Elbe proposal figured prominently in later Admiralty war planning and, arguably, into the First World War along with the advanced base theme along Germany's North Sea littoral.

IV.

The Russian Baltic Fleet's sinking of Hull fishing trawlers on the Dogger Bank on 22nd October 1904 led not only to a threat of war between Britain and Russia but again directed British attention towards the North Sea and German Fleet. As the crisis intensified, the Admiralty prepared to destroy the Russian fleet. Having replaced Kerr as First Sea Lord two days prior to the North Sea incident, the recent C-in-C Portsmouth, Sir John Fisher reinforced the Home Fleet and ordered the concentration of the Channel and Mediterranean Fleets to intercept the Russians should the diplomatic situation worsen. Even as a British fleet shadowed the Baltic Fleet, the new Service chief was convinced of German complicity in fomenting the crisis. Reflecting a general suspicion in British official circles, Fisher wrote to his wife, "Things look very serious. Its really the Germans behind it all....Peace seems assured tonight, but one never knows, as the German Emperor is scheming all he knows to produce war between us and Russia."⁴¹

German fears of being pulled into a Anglo-Russian conflict prompted the Kaiser, Bülow, and Holstein to approach the Tsar with a mutual defence treaty proposal. The intervention of the French Foreign Minister, Théophile Delcassé, in pacifying Anglo-Russian animosities and the Tsar's insistence that the French be informed of any Russo-

⁴⁰ *Anatomy*, p. 481.

⁴¹ Fisher to Lady Fisher, October 28, 30, 1904, Marder (ed), *Fear God and Dreadnought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, Volume 1*. (Hereafter referred to as, *FGDN*), (London, 1952), p. 111.

German negotiations quashed the Kaiser's initiative.⁴² Further incidents, such as the French allowing the Russians to use their harbour at Kamranh Bay in April 1905 heightened Admiralty's concerns that Britain might be drawn into a wider conflict on the side of her ally Japan, against France. Battenberg's successor as DNI, Captain (later Rear-Admiral Sir) Charles E. Ottley (February 1905-August 1907), believed as late as 1st May 1905 that there was a "considerable chance" that Britain would be drawn into a war against a Franco-Russian-German coalition.⁴³

Given the uncertainty of Britain's position, Fisher implemented a substantial redistribution of naval resources which, though not directed specifically at Germany, increased the number of battleships in home waters. Based on Battenberg's estimations that the Royal Navy would face either a Russo-German or a Franco-Russian combination, a flexible strategic contingency was adopted. In December 1904, the main British fleets were reconstituted with the former Home Fleet increased to 12 battleships and renamed the Channel Fleet. This fleet could be reinforced by the 8 battleships of the new Atlantic Fleet (former Channel) based at Gibraltar. The logic behind this "Gibraltar-based strategy" allowed the Admiralty to react to threats in home waters or to back up the Mediterranean Fleet should tensions caused by the Russo-Japanese War lead to a war with France.⁴⁴ While not the primary focus of the Admiralty's strategic redistribution, the First Sea Lord's hostility and his strategic intent towards Germany hardened because of the diplomatic upheavals generated by the war in the Far East.

Increased tension in Anglo-German relations during and immediately after the Dogger Bank crisis had a profound effect on the other side of the North Sea. Fisher's fleet re-concentration was accompanied by stories in the British press calling for a sudden pre-emptive strike upon the German fleet, similar to Admiral James Gambier's

⁴² Steinberg, "Copenhagen", pp. 33-4; White, *Transition*, pp. 105-116.

⁴³ *FDSF*, vol. I., pp. 110-11.

⁴⁴ Cabinet memorandum by Lord Selborne, "Distribution and Mobilisation of the Fleet.", December 6, 1904., in Boyce, *Crisis*, pp. 184-90; R. Mackay, "The Admiralty, the German Navy and the Redistribution of the British Fleet, 1904-05.", *The Mariner's Mirror*, Vol. 56. (1970), pp. 341-46.

attack on the Danish fleet at Copenhagen in 1807. The cumulative effect created a serious war scare in Germany during the winter of 1904-05. The German Admiralty Staff feared a surprise attack on their fleet as early as 1897 and had subsequently factored this “Copenhagen complex” into annual naval exercises from that period on.⁴⁵ August/September 1904 naval manoeuvres simulated a British attack on a German fleet in the Elbe and included the secondary objective of forcing the passage at Cuxhaven to close the western exit to the Kiel Canal. During the exercise, the “British” fleet (*Yellow*) successfully prevented the junction of the German fleet in the Elbe and a second squadron coming to its relief from Norway. The manoeuvre paralleled provisions from the Admiralty’s July 1904 war plan, and again confirmed that operations aimed at defeating German forces in the Elbe and the closing its entrance were feasible.⁴⁶

Official concerns that the British may attempt a Baltic thrust prompted the Kaiser to order plans for an invasion of Denmark to occupy and close the Belts to the Royal Navy in early December 1904. The Imperial edict was, however, vetoed in February 1905 by the Chief of the German General Staff, Count Graf von Schlieffen. The two Army Corps slated for the Denmark operation could not be spared from Schlieffen’s main plan for a sweep into Belgium, Holland, and France.⁴⁷ German naval and military evaluations of a war with England during the winter of 1904-05 reflected a real fear within the Kaiser’s retinue that the British intended a sudden *coup de main* against the High Seas Fleet. This paranoia was intensified by loose talk emanating from Whitehall. On 5th February, 1905, the Civil Lord of the Admiralty, Arthur Lee, publically proclaimed that the Royal Navy, “would get its blow in first before the other side had time even to read in the papers that war had been declared.” With the recent

⁴⁵ Steinberg, “Copenhagen”, pp. 23-31, 37-9, 41-4; *Anatomy*, pp. 496-98.

⁴⁶ “Foreign Naval Manoeuvres, 1904. Germany.”, NID Report No.758., March 1905, pp. 5-19. ADM 231/43, Nos. 754-771.; Steinberg, “Copenhagen Complex”, pp. 34-5.

⁴⁷ P. Kennedy, “The Development of German Naval Operations Plans against England”, in *War Plans of the Great Powers*, pp. 180-81.

surprise Japanese attack on the Russians at Port Arthur in the immediate background--not to mention "British" successes in the German manoeuvres of 1900-04--the Civil Lord's pronouncements heightened German anxieties and invoked a harsh rebuke from Wilhelm II.⁴⁸ In all likelihood, Lee's statement was directly attributable to another Admiralty source: Fisher.

The First Sea Lord deliberately provoked German fears by continually advocating a "Copenhagen" attack on the fleet at Kiel. By his own admission, he had openly suggested such a course of action to Edward VII in late 1904.⁴⁹ The seriousness of Fisher's rhetoric was imparted by Selborne to Prime Minister Balfour on 26th December: "I told you his proposal about the German fleet at Kiel. It was no use of paradox, nor said to shock. He meant it."⁵⁰ Fisher took a similar line with Selborne's successor, Lord Cawdor, at the height of the Moroccan Crisis in May-June 1905 when he made the suggestion that he be allowed to "smash up" the German Fleet.⁵¹ While some historians have ruled out Fisher's calls to "Copenhagen" the German Navy and others doubt that he seriously considered such an action "on a subconscious level",⁵² there is the very real probability that his convictions were legitimate and driven by an underlying purpose: deterrence.

Evidenced by the 1889 Naval Defence Act and 1893-94 Spencer Programme, British naval policy was predicated on maintaining the Royal Navy's command of the sea as a deterrent to the rise of hegemonic states or blocs intent on disrupting the European balance of power. Fisher continued this dictum by insisting that the British Army become the Navy's amphibious strike force--a "projectile" to be hurled against

⁴⁸ *Anatomy*, p. 498; Steinberg, p. 39.

⁴⁹ Fisher to King Edward VII, late October, 1904 quoted in Marder (ed), *FGDN*, Vol. 2., (London, 1956), p. 20.

⁵⁰ Mackay, *Fisher*, p. 319.

⁵¹ *FDSF Vol. 1.*, p. 113.

⁵² *FDSF Vol. 1.*, p. 113; Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 320-21.

an enemy's outlying possessions or strategically sensitive areas.⁵³ This increased the Navy's ability to inflict irreversible damage as an effective deterrent. The Navy's offensive strategy against France's principal naval ports and colonies was clarified throughout 1887-1904 through the intellectual rejuvenation of the Service's past and work done by the NID, the C-in-C's afloat, and independent study such as Ballard's 1897 RUSI paper. British naval manoeuvres during that period had continually tested these strategies and revealed what France could have expected had diplomatic crises such as the Fashoda imbroglio led to war. To act as a credible threat against Germany, the Admiralty required a similar offensive strategy that was taken seriously by the German hierarchy. Fisher's "Copenhagen" pronouncements, his Baltic "schemes", and amphibious plans against Schleswig-Holstein were all variations on the theme of applying pressure upon the enemy's most strategically vulnerable points as the basis of deterrence.⁵⁴ Arrived at independently, his views dovetailed with the NID's 1901-1903 North Sea studies which resulted in the Admiralty's July 1904 war plan against Germany.

Fisher's deterrence philosophy dated to his appointment as British naval representative at the 1899 Hague Peace Conference. In discussions with German delegates, Fisher became aware of their concern over the vulnerability of Germany's Baltic coasts, ports, and commerce, especially their substantive iron-ore trade with Sweden.⁵⁵ Later calls to "Copenhagen" the German fleet at Kiel, to conduct amphibious landings in Schleswig-Holstein, and other well-known Fisherisms such as "hitting first,

⁵³ Fisher to Lord Tweedmouth, December 23, 1905; Fisher to Edward VII, October 4, 1907; Fisher to Lord Esher, May 5, 1908, *FGDN Vol. 2.*, pp. 65, 143.

⁵⁴ A. Lambert, "Great Britain and the Baltic, 1890-1914", (forthcoming), pp. 6-8. I am greatly indebted to Professor Lambert not only for his paper, but for our many discussions on the topic. Also refer to: Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 216-24.

⁵⁵ Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher, *Records*, (London, 1919), pp. 55-6; Fisher to Lord Esher, April 25, 1912, *FGDN Vol. 2.*, pp. 454-5; Fisher to Lord Esher, November 19, 1903 and Fisher to Esher, April 25, 1912 in *Memories*, pp. 166-7, 210-12; D. Sweet, "The Baltic in British Diplomacy before the First World War", *Historical Journal*, Volume XIII, No. 3., 1970, p. 455; Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 219-24; A. Lambert, "Great Britain and the Baltic", pp. 2-4, 6-8.

hitting hard and hitting everywhere” may have originated within the context of the conference. It is crucial to realise, however, that beneath the fire-breathing rhetoric lay the key to his deterrence theory. Fisher was not a war monger by nature. In conveying the impression that the Royal Navy would smash the Kiel fleet to the King, to Selborne, and his allies in the British press, he was signalling that the Admiralty had the means, the knowledge, and the will to strike without warning should Germany threaten Britain’s vital interests. The purpose of Fisher’s bombastic statements is obvious from his explanation of the Admiralty’s November-December 1904 fleet reorganisation.

My sole object is PEACE in doing all this [the fleet redistribution]! Because if you “rub it in” both at home and abroad that you are ready for instant war with every unit of your strength in the first line, and intend to be “first in” and hit your enemy in the belly and kick him when he’s down and boil your prisoners in oil (*if you take any!*) And torture his women and children, then people will keep clear of you.⁵⁶

At the height of the Moroccan Crisis in the summer of 1905, Fisher put the hidden agenda behind his words into active play by despatching the Channel Fleet under Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson on a timely late August cruise of the Baltic. Since, “Our drill ground should be our battle ground”, he wrote to Julian Corbett, then lecturing at the Naval College at Greenwich, “I’ve taken means to have it whispered in the German Emperor’s ear.”⁵⁷

Fisher’s 1904-05 deterrent-based threats to strike the High Seas Fleet were not new. His December 1903 contention that submarines be let loose in Toulon harbour to inflict a first strike and “ferret out” French ships for destruction by a British fleet off the port was similar to the treatment he later threatened to mete out to the German fleet at Kiel.⁵⁸ Furthermore, his “Copenhagen” designs should be placed within the context of

⁵⁶ Fisher to ?, February 22, 1905, *FGDN Vol. 2.*, p. 51. Most likely the letter was to Fisher’s journalist friend and ally, W.T. Stead. See: Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 222-23.

⁵⁷ Fisher to Corbett, July 28, 1905, *FGDN Vol. 2.*, p. 63; Admiral Sir E. E. Bradford, *Life of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Knyvet Wilson*, (London, 1923), pp. 199-201; Wilson to Noel, August 15, 1905, NOE/4.A, Noel MSS, NMM.

⁵⁸ Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 302-04.

similar themes advocated, continually tested in manoeuvres, and ruminated over by the Admiralty, the NID, and Fleet C-in-C's throughout 1887-1904. The strategic studies initiated by Custance and expanded upon by the War Division throughout 1901-04 mirrored Fisher's proposals to "smash up" the High Seas Fleet. The potential success of such operations were evident in the NID's reports on the German naval exercises, while the Japanese attack on the Russian Pacific Squadron at Port Arthur proved that a pre-emptive strike was feasible. The correlation of Fisher's views with offensive themes already contemplated for the Dual Alliance adds credence to the notion that although the potential enemy may have changed, the Royal Navy's basic strategy had not. The work conducted by the NID throughout 1901-04 gave Fisher the offensive strategy which made his "Copenhagen" declarations a much more effective deterrent and provided the foundations for future operational planning against Germany.

In early 1905, the Admiralty's war plans against Germany were re-examined within the context of technical questions arising from the Russo-Japanese War. The employment of blockade mines off Port Arthur, and corresponding ship losses by both sides, sparked an inquiry from Balfour regarding the Navy's use of mines and blockade. The DNI, responded that the war had so far revealed a switch in the use of offensive mines from sealing-in an adversary to an observational blockade which forced the enemy to indicate when a sortie was imminent. Supporting this new form of offensive minelaying, Ottley presented a variation on the July 1904 plan of blocking the Elbe as a means of countering the German fleet and her seaborne trade to the CID. He believed that Germany was particularly vulnerable to an observational mine blockade, "Thus Germany, with her outlet to the sea limited so far as heavy vessels are concerned by the narrow waters of the Belts, and the three great estuaries of the Elbe, Weser, and Jade, is far more liable to injury from the sowing of a thousand blockade mines than is the United Kingdom with her splendid length of deeply indented coastline." Ottley proposed that 2,000 mines laid 100 yards apart, in four lines of 20 miles each, would effectively block the entrances to all three estuaries. Sunken trawlers interspersed amongst the minefields would impede sweeping operations and 1000 mines kept in

reserve to replenish lines that were successfully swept. Forcing the Germans to use the Baltic exit to the North Sea, the plan would “save” British ports from enemy minelaying, protect Britain from invasion, and impede Germany’s oversea commerce.⁵⁹ Fisher was unwilling to push the recommendations of a special Mining Committee, however, which supported Ottley’s proposals given his dedication to “economy” and the growing opposition to his other reform policies.⁶⁰ Ottley’s offensive mining report indicated the influence of the NID’s earlier studies/plans to restrict the movements of the German Fleet so it could be advantageously engaged near or in the Baltic. Further plans along this theme emerged as the Admiralty responded to aggressive German foreign policy aimed at destroying the *Entente*.

V.

The Moroccan Crisis, and the von Bülow--Holstein bid to fragment the Entente had ramifications beyond strengthening the fledgling Anglo-French friendship. With Delcassé’s forced resignation in June 1905 and the abortive Treaty of Björkö in July, the Kaiser’s goal of an anti-English continental bloc, based on a Russo-German alliance, seemed close to realisation. This, combined with Germany’s threat of a preventative war against a weakened France, clarified to British policy makers that Germany was now the principal threat to the Empire’s security.⁶¹ The Admiralty responded to the crisis by a further re-distribution of British naval power to the North Sea and expanding its existing

⁵⁹ Balfour’s queries, the Admiralty’s response “Floating Mines”, and Ottley’s subsequent memorandum, “Submarine Automatic Mines”, February 12, 1905, can be found in P.K. Kemp (ed), *The Papers of Admiral Sir John Fisher Volume II*, (London, 1964), pp. 90-106. Original copies of Ottley’s paper can also be found in ADM 116/866B, 1889-1912 Naval Staff Memoranda, Case #4173, dated November 12, 1905 and CAB 17/24, CID Miscellaneous Correspondence and Memoranda, containing a chart diagramming the mining plan for the Elbe, Weser, and Ems estuaries. P. Halvorsen, “The Development of Mines and Mine Warfare in the Fisher Era, 1900-1914”, M.Phil dissertation in Economic and Social History, Oxford, 1999, pp. 43-8; *Naval Necessities Volume II 1905.*, pp. 13-15, ADM 1/3093, Case #0026; Minutes of the 65th and 71st meetings of the CID, March 8 and April 19, 1905, CAB 2/2.

⁶⁰ Halvorsen, “Mine Warfare”, p. 48; Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 367, 370, 376-8.

⁶¹ Kennedy, *Antagonism*, pp. 275-84; Taylor, *Struggle*, pp. 428-42; S. R. Williamson, *The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War, 1904-1914*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), pp. 30-58.

plans against Germany. Within a month of Wilhelm II's late March visit to Tangier, Fisher intimated to the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne, that the time was ripe for a joint Anglo-French naval offensive in the Baltic:

This seems a golden opportunity for fighting the Germans in alliance with the French, so I earnestly hope you may be able to bring this about....All I hope is that you will send a telegram to Paris that the English and the French fleets are one. We could have the German Fleet, the Kiel Canal, and Schleswig-Holstein within a fortnight.⁶²

While the gist of the First Sea Lord's proposal cloaked his conviction that a threatened Baltic descent was the key to deterring Germany, Lansdowne failed to officially communicate Fisher's offer to the French.⁶³ It nevertheless hinted that supplements to the Admiralty's existing offensive plans were already under consideration.

The annihilation of the Russian Baltic Fleet at Tsushima in late May, profoundly effected the Royal Navy's future dispositions by removing Russia from the list of great naval nations. Overnight, the Two-Power Standard became irrelevant as among the other dominant naval powers: Japan was an ally, France a close friend under siege, and the United States congenial. Germany stood alone as the principal menace due to her instigation of the Moroccan predicament and the expanding High Seas Fleet. With the threat in Far Eastern waters removed, Fisher ordered 5 battleships from Admiral Gerald Noel's China Squadron home in early June. The battleship strength of the Channel Fleet was increased from 12 to 15, supported by the Atlantic Fleet's 9 ships at Gibraltar.⁶⁴ While the Navy's North Sea redistribution constituted "a strategic revolution",⁶⁵ the Admiralty conveyed the benign nature of the re-concentration, citing it in the November 1905 Cawdor Memorandum as indicative of the "kaleidoscope nature of international

⁶² Fisher to Lansdowne, April 22, 1905, *FGDN Vol. II.*, p. 55.

⁶³ Lambert, "Great Britain and the Baltic", p. 11; Williamson, pp. 43-4.

⁶⁴ Ottley, "The Balance of Naval Power in the Far East", (late May-early June), 1905 in Kemp (ed), *Fisher Papers Vol. II.*, pp. 79-84 and *Naval Necessities Vol. II.*, 1905, ADM 1/3093, PRO; *Anatomy*, pp. 435, 511-14.

⁶⁵ P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, (London, 1976), p. 217.

relations” and not representative of “a permanent allocation of numbers”.⁶⁶

The escalation of the Moroccan debacle in early June, prompted a reassessment of the Admiralty’s strategic options. On 24th June, Fisher ordered Ottley to draft a report on the current status of fleet dispositions should the Navy be forced to assist the French. The DNI replied that circumstances were “exceptionally favourable” since a combined Anglo-French fleet ensured that, “our maritime preponderance would be overwhelming” against Germany. As operational command rested with the Channel Fleet C-in-C, Sir A.K. Wilson, Ottley outlined the Admiral’s general orders and guidelines to assist in the formulation of a campaign plan. Upon the outbreak of hostilities, Wilson would implement a commercial blockade of all German ports, including the Baltic coast by either a strong force sent through the Belts or a closure of the straits. The latter course was, however, contingent upon the reaction of the Scandinavian states. In addition to the blockade of German colonial possessions, detached cruisers would attack German overseas trade in South American waters and the Pacific. Ottley requested Wilson’s opinions on the proposals for the employment of blockade mines and the July 1904 plan to block the Elbe with sunken hulks. Any decision to undertake these operations would be based on the C-in-C’s views and rest within his discretion.⁶⁷

The C-in-C Channel disagreed with the DNI’s emphasis on economic warfare as the most effective means to assist France. Wilson felt that the capture or destruction of Germany’s overseas trade and colonies would not materially affect the course of a war on the Franco-German frontier because Germany could compensate for her lost trade through neutral ports. A close naval blockade of Germany’s commercial ports would not prevent her armies from overrunning France. Wilson argued that Britain could better aid France via amphibious operations against Germany’s coasts to divert

⁶⁶ “Cawdor Memorandum”, November 30, 1905, *Naval Necessities Vol. III.*, 1906, p. 370, ADM 116/3094.

⁶⁷ Memorandum by Charles L. Ottley, DNI, “British Intervention in the Event of an Attack on France by Germany”, June 26, 1905, in *Anatomy*, pp. 502-03.

troops from the French frontier. If Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Russia remained neutral, Britain should attempt to capture the forts at the mouths of the Elbe and Weser by a combined military and naval expedition. He urged that other operations should aim at occupying Schleswig-Holstein and Kiel through landings on the coast of the Little Belt or Kiel Bay. To prepare for this, Wilson proposed: a re-commissioning of all small craft (gunboats and sloops) withdrawn from foreign stations, the preparation of obsolete battleships (*Admiral* and *Royal Sovereign* Classes) for bombarding fortifications, and the collection of flat-bottomed, light draught vessels for operations in the shallow waters off the German North Sea littoral.⁶⁸ The C-in-C believed, “Only by putting forth the whole military strength of the Empire that we can hope to succeed.”⁶⁹ Compatible with Fisher’s “Copenhagen” pronouncements, Wilson’s proposals mirrored the War Division’s 1903-04 operational studies and remained at the centre of the Navy’s offensive strategy throughout the Fisher administration.

Although the DNI and Wilson differed over the “means” of assisting France, both supported combined operations along the German coasts. Agreeing with Corbett’s assessment that these schemes were a vital projection of Britain’s maritime supremacy, Ottley wrote, “We should have to throw an expeditionary force ashore on the German Coast somewhere, in addition to any naval action we might take.” As he reasoned, “No other attitude would be worthy of our traditions, or would be acceptable to France.”⁷⁰ Along with Fisher and the War Division, Ottley and Wilson adhered to the principal axiom underpinning all contemporaneous Admiralty war plans: offensive operations aimed at the enemy’s most strategically vulnerable points—the “end” being the destruction of Germany’s fleet and successive attacks on its overseas commerce and ports. This theme, with its antecedents in plans against the Dual Alliance, remained the

⁶⁸ Wilson to Fisher, March 9, 1906, Fisher MSS, FISR 1/5, Churchill College, Cambridge.

⁶⁹ Memorandum by C-in-C Channel Fleet, Admiral Sir A.K. Wilson, June 27, 1905 in *Anatomy*, pp. 504-05.

⁷⁰ Ottley to Corbett, July 3, 1905, RIC/9, Richmond MSS, NMM.

apex of the First Sea Lord's deterrence policy.

In early July 1905, Fisher dispatched the Channel Fleet on a planned mid-August Baltic cruise. The Fleet called at Ymuiden in Holland and proceeded to Graa Diep off Esbjerg on the western Jutland coast, an anchorage valuable for operations off the Elbe estuary or to support a British fleet operating off the Skaw in the Skagerrak. Intended to familiarise the Channel Fleet with operations near the Skagerrak and Baltic, the cruise's other agenda was revealed in Admiralty instructions for Wilson to be prepared for a sudden descent on the German coast. The deterrence effect of the "cruise" was not lost on the C-in-C who, prior to the fleet's departure, wrote to a colleague that, "Politically I think it will do good."⁷¹ Non-officially, the Channel Fleet's August cruise imparted the gist of the First Sea Lord's deterrence policy towards Germany in the same waters outlined in Wilson's 27th June proposal for an amphibious attack on Schleswig-Holstein. Should further German actions precipitate a conflict, the Admiralty's strategy to support France carried the very real probability of immediate implementation. Fisher's admission to Corbett in late July that, "Or drill ground should be our battleground", was both "bark" and "bite".

VI.

The examination of amphibious options continued throughout the remainder of 1905. Based on consultations with Corbett and Wilson's Schleswig-Holstein proposals, Ottley drafted a CID memorandum in mid-July 1905 on the desirability of combined operations against Germany. The complex arrangements attending joint planning between the services would involve considerable delay in taking immediate action on the outbreak of war. Therefore, the DNI suggested the establishment of a special sub-committee on overseas operations. This body should include the CID's military and naval representatives and its secretariat to prepare plans for overseas operations. Such an organisation would enhance Britain's strategic response time to international crises. An overseas sub-committee would give service opinion the executive powers necessary

⁷¹ Wilson to Noel, HMS *Exmouth*, Channel Fleet, August 15, 1905, NOE/4a., Noel Papers, NMM; Bradford, *Wilson*, pp. 199-201.

to form and coordinate their plans prior to the outbreak of a conflict. The urgency of the Moroccan crisis and the potential need to assemble an expedition against a major continental power made the necessity of a joint coordinating body all the more expedient. Hypothetically, the question was whether British action against Germany should be limited to sea operations or include an amphibious expedition to Schleswig-Holstein to relieve pressure on the French frontier armies. The need for a coordinating body was essential since:

To carry sixty thousand British troops through the labyrinth of sandbanks and shoals shielding the German seaboard to a landing in Schleswig-Holstein would be an operation which might not be impracticable, but would certainly be arduous and would need careful study and high organisation. The danger of war had for the moment subsided. But the circumstances might recur, and even today the discussion can scarcely be regarded as purely academic.⁷²

Despite Ottley's recommendations, progress towards an inter-service planning body and combined operations was problematic given Fisher's actions and the War Office's attitude towards overseas expeditions.

Fisher's support for combined operations along the German seaboard was part of his dictum that the Army serve as the Navy's "projectile" and a key component of his deterrent policy. Not surprisingly, he threw himself behind the DNI's call for an overseas sub-committee as it furthered the subordination of the Army and amplified the deterrence factor in the Admiralty's war plans. With support from the CID Secretary, Sir George Clarke (1904-07), the DNI's suggestion was turned into a reality. In late July 1905, the Committee accepted the formation of the joint planning body. Marking the "high point" of the Admiralty's influence over the Defence Committee, the overseas sub-committee never met and the CID never became a forum for inter-service/civilian planning because the Army rejected the Navy's amphibious "schemes" while Fisher

⁷² Memorandum by the DNI, "Preparation of Plans for Combined Naval and Military Operations in War", July 16, 1905, ADM 116/866B, 1889-1912 Naval Staff Memoranda, CAB 17/5, CID Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers.

opposed the military's "continental strategy" to support France.⁷³

Before Morocco, the prospects for successful inter-service cooperation on amphibious projects had been favourable. Indirectly, the NID/Admiralty had promoted amphibious projects and collaboration with the Army through Ballard's lecture to the Aldershot Military Society in November 1903 and Hankey's 1904 work on advanced bases. Based on recommendations from Battenberg and the Captain of the War College, Edmond Slade, the Admiralty invited the General Staff to send officers to the Greenwich War Course in late 1904. Battenberg staunchly advocated such a venture for: "The more we can instil sound ideas of Naval War and the practical possibilities of joint action between the two Services into the minds of rising military men, the better."⁷⁴ This cooperative spirit was evident in September 1904 when the first joint inter-service manoeuvres occurred at Clacton in Essex. In a subsequent overseas expeditions conference— with Ballard as Admiralty representative-- the exercise was rigorously examined for general principles to be adopted. Issues evaluated included: the equipment and despatch of large combined operations, individual responsibilities of each service, and the orders/staff work entailed by such operations. Secondary considerations dealt with transportation details, embarkation, and disembarkation. The Clacton manoeuvre was indicative of the proper methods for large-scale amphibious operations, although doubts were expressed over the opposed landing of troops under modern conditions.⁷⁵

In late August 1905, Ballard began correspondence with Colonel C.E. Callwell, Assistant Director of the General Staff's Directorate of Military Operations (DMO) on the feasibility of combined Baltic operations. Within the Service community, Callwell

⁷³ d' Ombrain, *War Machinery*, pp. 68-72.

⁷⁴ "Attendance of Military and Royal Marine Officers at War Courses and of Naval Officers at the Staff College", War Office, June 2, 1905, Minute by Louis Battenberg, DNI, November 16, 1904. ADM 1/7859, Admiralty. War Office. January-August 1905.

⁷⁵ "Report of the Naval and Military Conference on Overseas Operations", March 20, 1905. (35 pages) NID Report No. 811, July 1906, ADM 231/47, Nos. 809-818 and ADM 1/7859.

was a proponent and authority on amphibious operations.⁷⁶ Their discussion examined an amphibious landing in eastern Schleswig-Holstein as the first item for consideration by the CID overseas operations sub-committee. Initially, Callwell was receptive to the proposal which might divert 400,000 German regulars from the Franco-German frontier. Ballard was asked by the DMO to work out the naval aspects of the operation. Throughout September, however, the General Staff dallied in supplying the ADNI with the necessary information to complete the NID's end of the planning.⁷⁷ The delay was caused by the summer holidays and opposition from other DMO staff officers to amphibious Baltic projects which they viewed as impracticable. Callwell's colleague, Major D. Fasson, deemed the proposal irrelevant to the main operational theatre and subject to failure. He cheekily referred to it as "Fisher's Invasion of Germany."⁷⁸ As early as January 1905, the DMO had explored sending an expeditionary army to support the French on the Franco-Belgian border. By the time the Callwell-Ballard exchange had been initiated, that strategy was clearly in the ascendency at the War Office.⁷⁹

An interesting point emerges from these abortive NID-DMO discussions. The seriousness with which the Admiralty sought a consensus with the General Staff over a Schleswig-Holstein expedition was apparent since these negotiations coincided with the Channel Fleet's late summer cruise. Deterrence of Germany aside, the timing of Ballard's approach to the General Staff and Wilson's presence in the Baltic may have been Fisher's demonstration that successful operations could be conducted within this region and that the Army should "get on board" with the Navy's strategy.

⁷⁶ C. E. Callwell, *The Effect of Maritime Command on Land Campaigns Since Waterloo*, (Edinburgh, 1897); idem, *Military Operations and Maritime Preponderance: Their Relations and Interdependence* (Edinburgh, 1905; Annapolis, 1996-reprint).

⁷⁷ Ballard to Callwell, August 28, 1905, Minute by Callwell, August 29, 1905, W.O. 106/46, Military Policy in the Event of War With Germany; Ballard to Major Adrian Grant-Duff, DMO, September 9, 1905, ADM 116/1043B, Part 2, Case 2. Summerton, "British Military Planning", Chapter Three; Williamson, pp. 46-9.

⁷⁸ "On Fisher's Invasion of Germany!", memorandum by Major D. Fasson, General Staff, September 7, 1905, W.O. 106/46.

⁷⁹ Williamson, pp. 46-9; d'Ombraïn, *War Machinery*, pp. 77-9; Summerton, Chapter Three.

The General Staff's rejection of the Schleswig-Holstein proposal came in a 3rd October 1905 memorandum from Callwell, who apologised for having "misled" Ballard in his earlier support for a Baltic landing. The Army ruled out amphibious ventures due to the "overwhelming" strength of German land forces in the region. Callwell did not entirely dismiss a landing in eastern Schleswig-Holstein provided that Alsen Island was seized as an advanced base. A Franco-British force would, however, be precluded from any other operations save the defence of its own beachhead. The hazardous nature of such a landing was underscored: "But the fact remains that an operation of this character could not be undertaken without running considerable risks and that it would do no very serious injury to the enemy....It might conceivably end in disaster." Not only could the Germans secure Kiel, the Canal, and Wilhelmshaven from attack with some 850,000 *Landsturm* reservists, they would successfully preserve their naval strength. Because of the "impracticable" nature of such an expedition, Callwell believed that the 120,000 British troops required would be better employed in preventing German successes along the French frontier--the "continental strategy".⁸⁰ While the DMO had made some valid points about the strength of German land defences in the Baltic, the Army's stance represented a fundamental misunderstanding of the Admiralty's strategy.

For far too long, historians have presented the Army's rejection of the 1905 Baltic expedition, and later variants of this plan, as proof that the Navy's prewar planning was obsolescent, unrealistic, and poorly conceived.⁸¹ The Admiralty's strategy was, in fact, the opposite--the product of a carefully constructed process formulated after 1887 as a response to the Dual Alliance, re-evaluated and modified by the NID and Fleet C-in-C's from 1901 onwards, and based on the traditional direction of British naval power at an enemy's strategic vitals as a deterrent. Should that fail, the same offensive strategy would expeditiously inflict such unacceptable damage that an

⁸⁰ Major A. Grant-Duff (DMO staff) to Captain G.A. Ballard (enclosure): Memorandum by Colonel Charles E. Callwell, Assistant DMO, "British Military Action in Case of War With Germany", October 3, 1905, ADM 116/1043B Vol. 2.

⁸¹ Haggie, "War Planning", p. 128-130; Summerton, Chapter 3.

adversary would abandon the conflict. Once Germany's fleet was destroyed, her commerce and ports were open to attack, a reality Ottley and Fisher knew only too well. An amphibious landing in Schleswig-Holstein would have diverted German troops away from other eastern Baltic ports which would thereafter be vulnerable to attack or blockade. Had the DMO's misinterpretation of the Schleswig-Holstein expedition contained equally detailed evaluations of German naval and shore defences in the Baltic, their critique might have been more credible.

The General Staff dismissal of the Schleswig-Holstein proposal was driven by another agenda: gaining Cabinet support for the "continental" plan as Britain's national strategy. Several inter-related factors spurred the Army to push this strategy at the expense of a more thorough appraisal of combined operations: it bolstered their position in relation to the government's defence expenditure allocation, improved military clout within the CID, and exorcised the ghosts of the Boer War which had diminished the military's reputation to the Navy's benefit. Moreover, the "continental" strategy prevented the Army from becoming a mere naval "projectile" and preserved its primacy as an independent organisation. Callwell was, despite his amphibious leanings, in the coterie of "new men" in the Army; die-hard "continentalists" who wanted an independent role for the service and greater responsibilities.⁸² It is not improbable, that the DMO corresponded with Ballard to obtain details of Admiralty planning to shore up CID support for their move towards the "continental" strategy by exposing weaknesses in the Navy's proposed Baltic operations.

The General Staff's critique of the Schleswig-Holstein proposal had little initial effect on the First Sea Lord. Fisher believed that the CID's overseas subcommittee would proceed and force the Army to work more efficiently under the Admiralty's leadership. Writing to Clarke, Fisher noted: "I look on this sub-committee as the one and only engine that will silently draw the War Office out of its present quagmire 'of one man waiting for another'. They are all of them each watching the other as to what

⁸² d' Ombrain, *War Machinery*, pp. 142-43, and 9-11, 75-9.

each are after.” Fisher’s concern that the Army sought a more independent role by rejecting the Admiralty’s proposals was highlighted by the possibility that the overseas sub-committee could be negated should the government change after the 1906 General Election.⁸³ The War Office position on amphibious operations and the primacy of its “continental” plan ensured the demise of the overseas sub-committee even before its first meeting.⁸⁴ From this point on, Fisher’s futile attempts to secure the Admiralty’s dominance over the Army, brought him to loggerheads with the War Office’s “continental” plan and, in the process, the CID as well.

Mounting tensions over Morocco, before the Algeciras Conference, spurred the CID Secretary to clarify possible intervention in support of France. With the overseas sub-committee a dead issue, Clarke used the CID as an informal staff to decide between the Admiralty’s amphibious designs or the Army’s commitment to France as the proper British response.⁸⁵ From 19th December 1905 to 15th January 1906, four conferences were held at the CID’s office’s in Whitehall Gardens. Although all of the participants: Clarke, Ottley, Lord Esher, and the C-in-C of Aldershot, General Sir John French, supported amphibious operations, the Army’s plans and its open conversations with French military authorities were slowly supplanting the Navy’s offensive strategy. The first conference outlined the Admiralty’s “actions”: the destruction or “masking” of the German Fleet, capture of German commerce at sea, a commercial blockade on German ports, isolation of her colonies, Anglo-French coastline security, and safeguarding French North African communications. Combined operations could take several forms: a fleet and amphibious forces in the Baltic to “menace” the German coastline; seizure of Baltic islands as a preliminary to a mainland expedition; and landing a large Anglo-French force to threaten Berlin or the communication lines of German armies operating against France. With French collusion, the Admiralty’s preparations centred on these

⁸³ Fisher to Clarke, October 12, 1905, *FGDN Vol. 3.*, p. 29.

⁸⁴ d’ Ombrain, *War Machinery*, pp. 78-81.

⁸⁵ Clarke to Esher, December 14, 1905 cited in Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 350-1.

contingencies, the employment of blockade mines against Germany, and the transport of British troops to Antwerp or northern French ports.⁸⁶ This first meeting revealed the extent of the NID's work in formulating a cohesive strategy and the Admiralty's adherence to its potential implementation. Ironically, six years later during the Agadir Crisis, the Navy would present many of the same contingencies before the CID, and receive a similar rebuff to its strategy to aid France.

The Whitehall Gardens group did not depreciate the Navy's ability to land and support 200,000 Anglo-French troops in Schleswig Holstein. Unfortunately, such an operation could only proceed after the German fleet had been destroyed and would have no immediate impact on battles along the French frontier. An alternative proposal to seize Rugen Island was tabled as it could lead to the establishment of a strong *pied à terre* for the landing of a future expeditionary force. The considerable time delay in the Admiralty's plan to aid the French influenced Clarke's decision that the DMO's proposal to despatch a British army to the Franco-Belgian frontiers warranted further consideration.⁸⁷ Under the direction of Clarke and Lord Esher, Colonel Repington, *The Times* military correspondent, began conversations with the French military attaché Victor Jacques Marie Huget and through him, the French General Staff, which preferred the support of British troops on the frontiers. These preliminary conversations led to official discussions between the French and British General Staffs and confirmation of the 'continental strategy'.⁸⁸ Fisher never consulted French naval authorities as he believed that the Royal Navy would handle all aspects of a naval war with Germany. The only exception was a brief conversation between himself and the French Naval Attaché, Captain Mercier de Lostende on 2nd January 1906. It was the only time prior to 1908 that Anglo-French naval conversations occurred on the issue of joint

⁸⁶ Notes of a Conference held at 2, Whitehall Gardens, December 19, 1905, CAB 18/24, CID: Miscellaneous Reports & Papers. Unnumbered CID Papers, 1905-1912.

⁸⁷ Notes of a Conference held at 2, Whitehall Gardens, January 6, 1906, CAB 18/24, CID: Miscellaneous Reports & Papers, 1905-1912.

⁸⁸ Williamson, pp. 66-78; d'Ombraïn, pp. 81-8.

cooperation in a possible war with Germany.⁸⁹

When the CID and the War Office endorsed the DMO's plan for despatching 100,000 British troops to the French Channel ports on 12th January 1906, Fisher took a decidedly belligerent stance.⁹⁰ When Clarke inquired about the state of naval preparations, the First Sea Lord expressed his adamant opposition to sending a British expeditionary force to France. He refused the naval support necessary to transport the troops across the Channel, deriding it as a "nuisance" for the Navy to have to safeguard "the Ferry". Adhering to the Schleswig-Holstein plan, Fisher was convinced that the Navy would predominate in any conflict with Germany. Ottley was pulled from the CID discussions and Clarke informed that naval cooperation with the French was out of the question.⁹¹

In correspondence with Esher, Fisher reiterated his opposition to Clarke's prodding by reaffirming that the Navy's preparations would remain exclusively its own preserve.

What does Clarke's letter which you send me resolve itself into? There are no naval plans for war because he doesn't know them! He has pumped Ottley and finds he doesn't know them either! He can go on pumping all round with the same result! The French War Office haven't told the English War Office their plans-what fools if they did! To peril their military plans for the drop in the ocean that our military support signifies! So also the English Admiralty intend to keep their own council! *But* as to our Navy not being ready! HOW SILLY!⁹²

To a certain extent, Fisher was justified in removing Ottley from the CID meetings and opposing the Committee's acceptance of the Army's "continental" plan. While some historians have defended Clarke's criticisms of the Admiralty's position, others claim that his actions were an unnecessary intrusion into the Navy's planning that deliberated

⁸⁹ Marder, *FDSF Vol. 1.*, pp. 117-18.

⁹⁰ Notes of a Conference held at 2, Whitehall Gardens, January 12, 1906, CAB 18/24.

⁹¹ Mackay, pp. 352-55.

⁹² Fisher to Esher, February 18, 1906, *FGDN Vol. 3.*, p. 30; Williamson, p. 79, footnote

irritated Fisher.⁹³ Esher certainly believed that Fisher was more than capable of dealing with strategic problems and supported Ottley's removal from the CID council. His reaction, however, had serious implications for the future of inter-service cooperation on combined operations by strategically isolating the Admiralty from the Army, the Defence Committee, and the French until Churchill's advent as First Lord in late 1911.⁹⁴

Fisher's opposition to the "continental strategy" and the Admiralty withdrawal from collaboration with the CID and Army was the result of several interrelated aspects. His objections to Clarke's interference and refusal to divulge the Admiralty's offensive plans to the Committee, the French, and the Army was partially due to the growing instability surrounding his own position. By early 1906, the opposition to Admiralty policy had not yet jelled as it later would under the "leadership" of Lord Charles Beresford and Custance. It was, however, still potent enough to warrant a "clamp down", especially in the realm of strategic planning. During his tenure as Service chief, Fisher "was engaged in a constant battle with his surroundings."⁹⁵ To openly reveal the Navy's offensive strategy before the CID or the French, in the face of growing Army assertiveness, might have undermined any chance of its successful implementation and compromised the central tenet behind the Admiralty plans: deterrence through a first strike capability. The NID's planning from 1902 on, Fisher's "Copenhagen" views, and additional Baltic plans after 1905, all represented a potential "masterstroke", the main essence of which was secrecy.⁹⁶ In concept and design, the "continental strategy" was the antithesis of the Admiralty's strategy as developed between 1902-05 and Fisher's policy to use the Navy's offensive strength to deter German ambitions or, if necessary,

⁹³ See: Mackay, p. 355; compare Williamson, p. 80; d'Ombrain, pp. 10-14, 81-9, 158, 207, 214, 218; and *FDSF Vol. 1.*, pp. 342-3.

⁹⁴ Hankey, *Supreme Command, Vol. 1.*, p. 65; d'Ombrain, pp. 85-7; Williamson, pp. 78-9. For Esher's views refer to: M. Brett and Viscount Esher Oliver (eds), *Journals and Letters of Reginald Viscount Esher, Volume 2.*, (London, 1934), pp. 134-5, 144-5.

⁹⁵ d'Ombrain, p. 158.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

swiftly terminate a conflict. The General Staff's design was diametrically opposite to his philosophy that war should be conducted with the utmost speed and violence to avoid a prolongation that unnecessarily wasted lives and energy. It was a theme he reiterated consistently throughout his life and remained a key component of future plans developed under his supervision.⁹⁷

The emergence of the "military entente" in early 1906, conflicted with Fisher's beliefs and quashed initiatives begun by the NID in 1903-04 for improved inter-service cooperation based on Britain's traditional maintenance of maritime supremacy as the guarantor of security. Traceable to studies and manoeuvres conducted during the Dual Alliance rivalry, the Navy's proposals were, arguably, more advanced in concept, design, and application than the Army's plan to directly support France. While the despatch of a large expeditionary force to the Northwest Frontier had been considered since 1903, the contingency to send the British Army to France did not emerge until January 1905.⁹⁸ Amphibious Baltic operations dominated the Navy's plans for years but were, with a few exceptions, devoid of any constructive military input. Admiralty planning after 1906 augmented the offensive themes formulated throughout 1902-05 as a response to the growth of the German fleet, the Russo-Japanese War, and the Moroccan imbroglio. Later contingencies also sought to counter German foreign policy moves, but in a region vital to the Royal Navy's strategic interests: the Baltic.

⁹⁷ Fisher, *Records*, pp. 227-30.

⁹⁸ J. McDermott, "The Revolution in British Military Thinking from the Boer War to the Moroccan Crisis" in *War Plans of the Great Powers*, pp. 99-112; d'Ombrain, p. 78, footnote #11.

Chapter Three: The Scandinavian Dimension and War Planning, 1906-1907.

I.

From June 1905 to April 1908, the Royal Navy's strategic interests were wedded to the debate over Norwegian and Scandinavian neutrality. At issue were the Baltic entrances and Russo-German attempts to turn the sea into a *mare clausum*. British policy hinged upon Foreign Office/Admiralty efforts to preserve the Navy's access to the Baltic in the event of war. The Admiralty's response was to implement a series of operational plans against Germany in late 1906. Unlike their antecedents, however, the Ballard Committee's 1907 war plans were a deliberate reaction to the possibility that the Navy's freedom of action in the North Sea and Baltic, and Britain's influence on the European balance of power, was jeopardised by the uncertain status of the Baltic entrances.

The Admiralty's 1907 War Plans reflected the same themes developed in the 1890's, especially the projection of the Royal Navy's power against an enemy's vulnerable regions. By 1902-05, these areas included the Kiel Canal, the Baltic, and German North Sea littoral. Inshore, observational blockade, and amphibious operations against these points were repeated by the same planners involved in earlier contingencies. The 1907 plans also explored an offensive economic campaign directed at Germany's substantial overseas trade: an aspect marginally outlined in preceding studies.

Analyses of the Fisher regime's war planning have paid little attention to the importance of the Scandinavian dimension or ignored it all together. The general consensus is that the 1907-08 plans were obsolete, unrealistic, and manufactured at Fisher's behest to buttress his position from attack by opponents within the Service. Others have linked his failure to develop a proper naval staff with the whole planning process.¹ While there was overlap between staff and planning issues, the quality and

¹ Haggie, "War Planning", pp. 120, 124, 128-30; Hayes, "Admiralty's Plans" pp. 95-6; N. Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, pp. 179-81.

realism of the contingencies created throughout 1905-09 did not suffer because of the fratricidal dissension generated by the “Fisherites” and the “Syndicate of Discontent”. That the plans coincided with a diplomatic crisis involving the Navy’s possible exclusion from the Baltic presents grounds for a reappraisal.

The planning conducted in 1906-07 was taken seriously by the Admiralty. This is established by several interrelated factors backed by examination of the evidence. The economic orientation of the contingencies was a realistic assessment based on the projection of sea power against areas vital to Germany’s national existence: its massive overseas trade and chief commercial ports. Vigorous offensive operations aimed at cutting Germany’s Baltic trade, especially Swedish iron-ore, coexisted with more moderate methods of curtailing seaborne commerce through a distant blockade. The plans were not haphazard creations to prop up Fisher, but lucid and flexible alternatives based on current diplomatic realities and the vulnerability of Germany’s economy. An evaluation of the officers involved in the 1907 planning reveals that the Admiralty seriously reconsidered its existing operational designs for an Anglo-German war. The main planners were, at the time, the Navy’s leading specialists in the operational studies’ realm through their earlier NID work between 1902-05. Had the plans been compiled solely for Fisher’s personal motives, the Ballard Committee’s selection would not have warranted such careful attention.

Another factor overlooked in evaluations of the Navy’s 1906-08 planning was the attention invested by the Admiralty in actively testing the war plans. The appraisal of operational plans through manoeuvres began in 1888 and remained throughout the Dual Alliance rivalry. During the latter part of 1907, the Channel and Home Fleets again conducted manoeuvres to test scenarios outlined in the Ballard Committee’s work. Arrangements for the creation of proper coaling and flotilla bases on Britain’s East Coast also demonstrated that an “observational” investment of Germany’s North Sea littoral, before a Baltic campaign, was accepted Admiralty strategy.

The Admiralty’s procurement policy demonstrated that aspects of the 1907 Plans were legitimate. By early 1906, the Fisher regime was considering the construction of

fast light cruisers to support flotillas consisting of new, longer range destroyers, such as the *River* Class introduced in 1904-05. The decision was a deliberate *volte face* to Fisher's earlier reform to purge the Navy of old unarmoured cruisers. This sudden switch from a publically declared policy revealed that the Admiralty sought the requisite ships to conduct the inshore North Sea and Baltic operations projected in the war plans. These realities, coupled with diplomatic efforts to retain access into the Baltic, demonstrated that 1906-07 naval planning was more than a ruse to thwart opposition to Fisher's reforms. In fact, this issue came to dominate his policies.

II.

Free access to the Baltic was a traditional axiom in British naval/foreign policy. Scandinavian timber and supplies were the Royal Navy's lifeblood from the late seventeenth century to the end of the Napoleonic Wars. From 1815 to 1890, the Baltic remained a potential theatre for naval operations aimed at curbing Russian aggression in the Mediterranean, the Far East, or Central Asia. Evidenced by the Crimean War, the Baltic was Britain's only avenue for bringing direct pressure to bear on Russia itself. Denmark and the Straits were also crucial. While the Admiralty focussed on the French fleets in the 1890's, the potential for Baltic operations remained. This possibility underscored Russo-German fears and their desire to turn the Baltic into a *mare clausum* in the early years of the twentieth century.² Wilhelm II played on Russian fears of a British Baltic descent to affect a Russo-German compact and a realignment of the European balance of power around Germany. The initial steps occurred at a meeting between Wilhelm and Nicholas II at Darmstadt in November 1902 to discuss the permanent neutralisation of Denmark. If Danish neutrality could not prevent the Royal Navy from entering the Baltic via the Belts and the Sound, Nicholas believed Germany

² A. Lambert, "Part of a long line of Circumvallation to confine the future expansion of Russia: Great Britain and the Baltic, 1809-1890", in G. Rystad, K-R. Böhme, W. Carlgren (eds), *In Quest of Trade and Security: The Baltic in Power Politics, 1500-1990, Volume I*, (Lund, 1994), pp. 297-394; op. cit, "This is All We Want: Great Britain and the Baltic Approaches, 1815-1914" in J. Sevaldsen (ed), *Britain and Denmark: Political, Economic and Cultural Relations in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, (Copenhagen, 2003) , pp. 147-69; *The Crimean War: British Grand Strategy Against Russia, 1853-1856*, (Manchester, 1990).

and Russia should do so by utilising Danish forts.³ In December 1903, the Kaiser broached the neutrality question with the Danish King Christian IX, and attempted to cajole Denmark into a Russo-German alliance to preclude British entry into the Baltic in an Anglo-Russian war. This approach foundered on Danish indecision and German naval concerns. The Chief of the German Admiralty Staff, Admiral Büchsel, convinced the Kaiser to forgo a Danish alliance in favour of a plan to occupy the Belts. This would tempt the British fleet into Danish waters where Germany held the tactical advantage.⁴ Büchsel's recommendations were symptomatic of the growing "Copenhagen complex" then gripping the German naval and political leadership. A simulated British *coup de main* against Kiel had formed the basis of the 1903 German Naval Manoeuvres.⁵ The Kaiser's loftier desire for a Russo-German alliance masked the real intent of the negotiations: the vulnerability of the German fleet to a sudden British naval offensive.

The 23rd- 24th July 1905 Björkö meeting marked the apogee of Germany's attempt at a Russian alliance and the end of the Kaiser's early intrigues to restructure Europe around the German orbit. This "abortive" defensive treaty, like the alliance offered to Russia in 1903, was quashed by Russia's refusal to jeopardise its obligations to France.⁶ Following Norway's secession from Sweden in June 1905, the treaty again reflected Russo-German concerns over Denmark's strategic position and their goal of a Baltic *mare clausum*. Wilhelm hoped an alliance would become the basis for a new

³ J. A. Lepsius, A. Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, and F. Thimme (eds), *Die grosse Politik der europäischen Kabinette, 1871-1914, Volume XVIII, 1*, (Berlin, 1922-7), p.75; P. Salmon, *Scandinavia and the Great Powers, 1890-1940*, (Cambridge, 1997), p.66.

⁴ Salmon, pp. 64-7; F. Lindberg, *Scandinavia in Great Power Politics, 1905-08*, (Stockholm, 1958), pp. 5-7; Carl-Axel Gemzell, *Organisation, Conflict, and Innovation: A Study of German Naval Strategic Planning, 1888-1940*, (Lund, 1973, pp. 65-6; Lambi, pp. 181, 218-24; P. Kennedy, "The Development of German Naval Plans Against England, 1896-1914" in *War Plans of the Great Powers*, pp. 177-80.

⁵ Refer to Chapter Two, above; Steinberg, "Copenhagen", pp. 23-46; "Germany. Naval Manoeuvres, 1903.", *Foreign Naval Manoeuvres, 1903.*, NID Report No. 719., pp. 7-19, ADM 231/40, Nos. 716-727.

⁶ Refer to Chapter Two, above; Salmon, pp. 67-8; *Die grosse Politik, Volume XLX, 2*, pp. 435-528; White, *Transition*, pp. 158-9, 173-4; Taylor, *Struggle*, pp. 432-34.

continental bloc, eventually including France. This “new great centre of gravity” would attract the Scandinavian states and exclude British influence from the Baltic. The Kaiser again played on the Tsar’s apprehensions by suggesting that Norway’s independence could lead to Britain’s seizure of a Norwegian base at Christiansand, the loss of Nicolas’ Murman ports, and the elimination of Russian North Sea access via the Kattegat.⁷ Wilhelm was convinced that British influence over Norway was inevitable by the machinations of his uncle, King Edward VII, who championed the investiture of his son-in-law, Prince Carl of Denmark (Haakon VI), as the new Norwegian king.⁸ When Wilhelm again attempted to co-opt Denmark into the Russo-German sphere, Danish suspicion and British hostility towards the alliance’s hidden agenda (the closure of the Belts) ensured that Germany’s case could not be made in Copenhagen. On 2nd August, 1905, Nicholas was informed that the Danish compact was a dead issue.⁹ Fisher’s despatch of the Channel Fleet on a mid-August Baltic cruise, also moderated Wilhelm’s decision not to push the alliance/neutrality issue with the Danes.¹⁰ After the failure to ratify the Björkö Treaty, no further German initiatives involving an alliance with Denmark were undertaken.¹¹

The proclamation of Norwegian independence on 7th June 1905, precipitated a crisis that brought Norway and Sweden to the brink of war. For Britain, the main concern involved any agreement meant to replace November 1855/March 1856 treaties

⁷ H. Bernstein (ed), *The Willy-Nicky Correspondence: Being the Secret and Intimate Telegrams Exchanged Between the Kaiser and the Tsar*, (New York, 1918), p. 191; Lindberg p. 35; Salmon, pp. 68-9; White, pp. 226-32.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 69; S. Lee, *King Edward VII: A Biography, 2 Volumes*, (London, 1925-7), pp. 315-26.

⁹ Salmon, p. 70; Lindberg, pp. 35-7; Bernstein (ed) *Willy-Nicky*, pp. 117-20.

¹⁰ Refer to Chapter Two, above.

¹¹ N. Rich, *Friedrich von Holstein: Politics and Diplomacy in the Era of Bismarck and Wilhelm II, Volume 2*, (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 718, 728.

which had guaranteed the Kingdom of Norway and Sweden after the Crimean War.¹² The Norwegians desired that the Great Powers recognise Norway's independence, integrity, and neutrality. These issues, and the status of the Baltic entrances extended to Sweden and Denmark when the Norwegians asked for a reservation clause allowing them to assist the other states should either be attacked.¹³ This benign request soon opened a "Pandora's box", placing the strategic and political status of the entire region in doubt.

Initially, the Foreign Office and Admiralty were concerned over Norway's ability to resist foreign pressures to hand over territory which could strategically alter the existing power balance in the North Sea. Britain's Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne, saw it as a "serious blow to British interests" if Norway's situation led "any other Power", especially Russia, to acquire a port on the Norwegian coast. It was essential that either a general guarantee of Scandinavian integrity be settled by all the European powers, the 1855 Treaty be renewed, or Britain reach its own Scandinavian agreement.¹⁴

Admiralty apprehension over leaving Norway unguaranteed mirrored Foreign Office observations that Russia may attempt to annex Finmark and gain a North Sea port. The DNI, outlined the strategic implications of ignoring Norwegian requests for a neutrality agreement, warning that "the slow glacial drift of Russian intrigue and Russian expansion" could not be ignored.¹⁵ In February 1905, the CID Secretary reiterated the Admiralty's view that Danish neutrality be guaranteed to prevent the Belts

¹² David Sweet, "The Baltic in British Diplomacy before the First World War", *The Historical Journal*, Volume XIII., No. 3., (1970), pp. 451-3; White, p. 228.

¹³ Salmon, pp. 71-2.

¹⁴ G. P. Gooch and H. Temperley, *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914: Volume VIII, Arbitration, Neutrality, And Security*, (London, 1932), Lansdowne to Sir R. Rodd, May 23, 1905, pp. 94-5. Sweet, pp. 458-9.

¹⁵ Memorandum by the DNI to the CID, June 5, 1905, CAB 17/59. CID: Miscellaneous Correspondence and Memoranda, Foreign Countries: Scandinavia, 1904-1907.

from falling into Russian or German hands.¹⁶ June 1905 discussions in Denmark and Sweden over the deepening the Sound for the passage of heavy commercial vessels added to British anxieties. The Admiralty believed it “ill-advised” to agree to any deepening of the Sound. The only benefit to the whole scheme was that the Sound presented a less vulnerable route into the Baltic in bypassing “the dangerous vicinity of Kiel.”¹⁷

Björkö indicated that Germany was exploiting Scandinavian instability to establish a *mare clausum* in the Baltic. The Channel Fleet’s Baltic cruise in August 1905 was both an attempt to neutralise German predominance in the region and a demonstration of deterrence during the Moroccan debacle.¹⁸ The outbreak of the Scandinavian crisis also coincided with the revision of existing war plans against Germany. Continuing the 1902-04 NID work, the Ottley-Wilson designs from June/July 1905 established the importance of the Baltic entrances to the Navy’s operational plans.¹⁹ Alongside Morocco, these contingencies were a reaction to the strategic instability caused by Norwegian independence.

Rumours over Swedish proposals to deepen the Sound in early 1906, again drew the Admiralty’s attention to the importance of the Baltic entrances. In late February, the British Naval Attaché in Berlin, Commander Philip Dumas, reported that while in Copenhagen he heard considerable discussion over a Swedish proposal to dredge the Sound’s Flint Channel. The implications were beneficial for the Admiralty’s existing strategy as “it would open a fresh and unguarded approach to the German Baltic Ports

¹⁶ Clarke to Lansdowne, “The Perpetual Neutrality of Denmark”, February 6, 1905, CAB 17/59.

¹⁷ Confidential. Foreign Office, June 10, 1905. “Denmark. Proposed deepening of the Sound”, Cover minute by DNI, C.L. Ottley, June 23, 1905, ADM 1/7841, Admiralty. Foreign Office. June 1905.

¹⁸ Refer to Chapter Two, above; Sweet, pp. 457-8; “British Naval Policy and German Aspirations”, *Fortnightly Review*, September 1905 in Kemp (ed), *Fisher Papers V.2.*, (London, 1964), pp. 301-3.

¹⁹ Refer to Chapter Two; *Anatomy*, pp. 502-5.

and might result, in case of war, in enabling England to close the Kiel Canal from both ends.” While a deepened Sound would give the High Seas Fleet a third passage out of the Baltic, Dumas believed that in a war, Germany would seize Denmark “en masse” to close all the Baltic entrances. Unless a British or French force was positioned near the Skaw, nothing could be done. In the attaché’s estimation, Germany favoured the Swedish proposal as it furthered their strategic designs on Denmark.²⁰

Dumas’s report mirrored Admiralty/Foreign Office fears of a potential Swedish drift towards Germany. Because the Sound was an alternative route into the Baltic, the Foreign Office avoided deliberately offending the Swedes by agreeing to any future Norwegian guarantee that endangered their interests. If the Swedes felt slighted or abandoned in the neutrality issue, they would be forced into an agreement with Germany, the only other power which could protect them from Russia. Although the new Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, continued Lansdowne’s policy of supporting a Norwegian/Scandinavian neutrality agreement guaranteed by all the European powers, he hoped to promote a *rapprochement* between Norway and Sweden as an adjunct to any new arrangement.²¹

Foreign Office machinations to counter German influence in Scandinavian affairs were complemented by another Admiralty demonstration. Emulating the previous summer, Fisher despatched the Channel Fleet on another Baltic cruise from late July to early September 1906. The fleet’s itinerary included visits to Swedish, German, and Russian ports.²² His thinly cloaked deterrence was a rebuttal to similar German naval demonstrations and diplomatic attempts to sway the Scandinavian states. As before, the cruise conveyed the Navy’s intention to pursue Baltic operations in the event of war and was not mere pantomime.

²⁰ Report by Commander Philip Dumas, British Naval Attaché to Berlin, February 23, 1906. Germany/N.A. Report 7/06 Confidential. ADM 1/7841, PRO.

²¹ Sweet, p. 460.

²² *Ibid*; “Baltic Cruise, 1906.”, ADM 144/27. Admiralty: Channel Squadron and Fleet: Correspondence 1867-1907., pp. 132-72.

Strategic preparations, too, served as the sub-text to Fisher's "diplomacy". In late March-early April 1906, the Admiralty redistributed its home destroyer flotillas in coorelation with the NID's earlier plans. Three separate divisions comprising the new, long-range *River* Class destroyers were created within Home flotillas by Rear-Admiral, (D) (C-in-C Destroyers/Torpedo Craft) Alfred Winslow. The reorganisation reflected: "the policy likely to be adopted in case of war" which was "to detach at least 12 river class boats to an advanced base, near the enemy's port to be watched."²³ The arrangement conformed to the July 1904 plan for a close watch on the Elbe, British flotillas near the Skaw, and Ottley's June 1905 close blockade of Kiel and Germany's Baltic ports.²⁴ This was complemented by the issue of German Government coastal charts to the Channel Fleet in mid-April 1906. The Admiralty thought this prudent in "case of an emergency arising" which called for the replication of the larger German charts "for purposes other than those of ordinary navigation."²⁵ Both policies were driven by the deeper strategic connotations associated with a potential naval war with Germany.

When Norway verified the guarantee it desired at the end of 1906, the implications enhanced British doubts over the status of the Baltic entrances. On 13th December, Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, Norwegian Minister to London, communicated his government's first draft treaty to the Foreign Office. The document re-confirmed the Norwegian position outlined in 1905: Britain, France, Germany, and Russia would recognise Norway's neutrality and guarantee its independence and integrity. Moreover, the provisions stipulated that Norway be allowed to depart from its neutrality and assist

²³ Rear-Admiral (D) Alfred L. Winslow, HMS "SAPPHIRE II" at Portland to C-in-C Channel Fleet, April 6, 1906, ADM 144/19. Admiralty: Channel Squadron and Fleet: Correspondence, 1867-1907. Destroyers and Torpedo Boats, May 1903-June 1907, pp. 267-72.

²⁴ Refer to Chapter Two, above; *Anatomy*, pp. 479-80, 502-05.

²⁵ "Secretary of Admiralty to C-in-C Channel Fleet, April 11, 1906": "C-in-C Channel Fleet to the Flag Officers, Respective Captains, and Officers Commanding H.M. Ships and Vessels, Channel Fleet", April 21, 1906, ADM 144/26. Admiralty. Channel Squadron and Fleet: Correspondence, 1867-1907. Records Channel Fleet. Volume 1., pp. 344-5.

both Denmark and Sweden should either be attacked. It was this last qualification which had such potentially damaging consequences to the Admiralty's strategy for a naval war with Germany. The extension of neutrality to Denmark and Sweden implied the inclusion of their territorial waters and meant that the Belts/Sound would be closed to belligerent warships during a conflict. From this point on, this dimension became the key issue for the Foreign Office during the Norwegian neutrality debates.²⁶ With the status of the Baltic entrances in further doubt, the Admiralty redefined its strategic options in the event of war with Germany.

III.

The day following the submission of the Norwegian draft treaty, 14th December, 1906, Fisher created a secret committee to draft a series of war plans against Germany. Ballard, then commanding HMS *Terrible* in reserve at Portsmouth, was chosen to chair the panel.²⁷ The timing and Ballard's selection as committee president were no coincidence. Foreign Office minutes on the draft emphasised preserving the freedom of the "narrow waters" into the Baltic in a Scandinavian neutrality guarantee.²⁸ Ballard's appointment was significant, for he had recently served as senior naval officer on General Owen's Imperial Coastal Defence Committee and was ADNI in charge of the NID's War Division from 1904 to July 1906. His intellectual acumen, War Division service, and his work on earlier war plans made him the Service's most experienced operational planner.²⁹ This was certified when Fisher offered him the DNI's post only

²⁶ Sweet, pp.460-2; "First Norwegian Draft Treaty, Communicated by Dr. Nansen, December 13, 1906", *BD, VIII*, No. 88., pp. 98-101.

²⁷ G. A. Ballard, "Record of Business, letters, &c.", December 14, 1906 entry, Ballard Papers, MS80/200, Box 1, NMM.

²⁸ "First Norwegian Draft Treaty", Minutes by Eyre Crowe and Sir Edward Grey, December 28, 1906, *BD VIII*., pp. 99-101.

²⁹ Refer to Chapters One and Two above; Ballard, "Remarks. On the Framing of Certain Plans...", May 1909, ADM 1/8997; Ballard, Record of Business, Letters, &c.. Entry for 3 July, 1906, Ballard Papers, MS80/200, Box 1., NMM.

two weeks after his being made planning committee chair.³⁰ The powers accorded Ballard to create plans “as full and complete as possible” was also impressive. Fisher had directed the Sea Lords and Admiralty departmental heads to afford Ballard “every facility in their power” in the pursuit of the planning work.³¹ Given the gravity of what a Scandinavian neutrality agreement entailed for Baltic operations, Fisher wanted the Service’s best “strategist” at the helm of the new endeavour.

The Ballard Committee’s deliberations occurred at the Admiralty, but mainly, at the War College in Portsmouth from December 1906 to April-May 1907. The Committee’s membership included the College’s President, Captain E.J.W. Slade, and Julian Corbett, then a lecturer on the War Course. Slade’s (and staff) role was mostly advisory; the College’s war games serving merely to test the feasibility of designs before final acceptance.³² Ballard’s intimation of this, similarities with the NID’s 1902-05 plans, and the Scandinavian neutrality context in which they were drafted, indicates that the 1907 plans were not based on the “juvenile” war games conducted at the College.³³ Corbett’s role was to provide academic insights on some of the strategies outlined in the plans. Fisher believed that the historian, “could add most materially in their educational value--”.³⁴ Despite being one of Fisher’s chief propagandists, Corbett had little impact on the planning process, and was unaware of the “secret” material and details of the various proposals. Brought into the Committee when the work was

³⁰ *Ibid*, Record of Business..., January 3, 1907 entry, NMM. Fisher wanted Ballard to either replace Ottley as DNI or let his name stand as an alternate candidate in case the latter was not accepted as Secretary of the CID. Ballard refused the offer to become DNI to get his sea time as Captain. He did, however, agree to stand as an alternative for the CID post.

³¹ Ballard, “Remarks....”, ADM 1/8997.

³² *Ibid*., “Remarks...”, pp. 1-2; “Some Notes on the Early Days of the Royal Naval War College”, *The Naval Review*, Vol. XIX, 1931., pp. 237-47; Kemp, *Fisher Papers* v.2., “Part IV. War Games, November 1906-January 1907”, pp. 446-54.

³³ Kemp, *Fisher Papers*, Vol.2., pp. 316-7.

³⁴ Fisher to Corbett, March 9, 1907, Fisher MSS, FISR 1/5, #232, Churchill College Archive, Cambridge.

completed, Corbett elaborated on the “strategic tenets” underlying the plans, nothing more. His work contradicted the plans on several key points, providing contemporary critics such as Lord Charles Beresford and later historians with “evidence” that the Admiralty’s 1907 war plans were merely a sham to dupe Fisher’s opponents.³⁵

The Committee’s other chief planner was Ballard’s NID colleague, the future CID Secretary, Captain Maurice P.A. Hankey, RMA. As the War Division’s coastal defence/amphibious analyst (1902-06), he had accompanied Ballard on the Owen Committee’s imperial defence inspection prior to his appointment to Portsmouth.³⁶ Kept abreast of developments, Ottley was not involved in the planning process. Ballard and Hankey carried out most of the technical work with the former travelling to London once or twice a week to confer with Fisher while Hankey kept “in touch” with Ottley.³⁷ Repeating their War Division performance, the Ballard-Hankey “team” were again the nucleus of the Admiralty’s planning in 1906-07 as they had been throughout 1902-05.³⁸ Their designs continued the NID’s 1902-04 North Sea studies and amplified many of the same strategic themes dating from the late 1890’s.

The “Admiralty War Plans Against Germany-1907” comprised three sections: Part 1, Corbett’s scholarly introduction, “Some Principles of Naval Warfare”; Part 2, Slade’s “General Remarks on War with Germany: A Preamble for Reflection and Criticism”; Part 3, Plans A (A1) to D (D1) with Appendices.³⁹ Corbett’s contribution

³⁵ Schurman, *Corbett*, pp. 66-7; Haggie, pp. 120-5; Kemp, pp. 316-7; N. Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, pp. 180-1.

³⁶ Refer to Chapter Two above; Hankey, *Supreme Command v.1.*, pp. 24-5, 30-9; Roskill, *Hankey v.1.*, pp. 61-2, 66-7.

³⁷ Hankey, *Supreme Command v.1.*, p. 39.

³⁸ This contradicts Professor Schurman’s belief that the Navy’s war planning “triumvirate” throughout 1905-07 was Ottley, Corbett, and Slade. Refer to: *Corbett*, pp. 41-5. Given the minor role played by these individuals and the War College in the drafting of the 1907 Plans, Schurman’s contention is questionable.

³⁹ The Admiralty’s 1907 War Plans Against Germany and the 1908 “W” series plans comprise ADM 116/1043B, Parts 1 and 2 at the PRO. The Ballard Committee’s work, save Fisher’s Commentary on the plans, are published in their entirety in Kemp (ed), *The Fisher Papers v.2.*, pp. 318-464.

included axioms he and Slade had worked on in the War Course, published as “Strategic Terms and Definitions used in Lectures on Naval History”, and commonly known as “The Green Pamphlet”.⁴⁰ Aspects of the “Green Pamphlet” discussed in Part 1 dealt with general principles such as plans being dependent on the conflict. The Introduction’s theme involved Corbett’s “Command of the Sea” theory which was based on control of maritime communication lines, was never absolute, and was only exercised by “minor” types (cruisers and flotillas).⁴¹ Contrasting the Admiralty’s existing offensive plans, Corbett deprecated the close blockade under modern conditions. He advocated a more open blockade with the British fleet in a secure position beyond an enemy’s torpedo flotillas, similar to Philip Colomb’s “masking-observational” categories. Flotillas had, “destroyed close blockade, the pivot on which the old strategy mainly turned.”⁴² Excluded from the Committee’s planning work, it is doubtful that Corbett realised that the war plans contained both his “open” blockade prescription and enhanced versions of the “old” strategy.

Part 2, “General Remarks on War with Germany: A Preamble for Reflection and Criticism”, was Slade’s contribution to the Committee’s work. It duplicated his September 1906 paper, “War With Germany”, which outlined triggers for a future conflict and contingencies for each case.⁴³ These included: a German invasion of the Low Countries, absorption of the Austro-Hungarian/Ottoman Empire, and the establishment of German colonies in South America.⁴⁴ Slade merely reiterated case

⁴⁰ Schurman, *Corbett*, pp. 50-5, 67 and *Education*, pp. 164-5.

⁴¹ Kemp, *Fisher Papers* v.2., pp. 318-28.; “The Green Pamphlet”. War Course. “Strategical Terms and Definitions used in Lectures on Naval History.” prepared by Julian S. Corbett, Esq., I.L.M. (Lecturer in Naval History), Corbett MSS, MS 81/143, Box 6: War College, Admiralty, and Committee of Imperial Defence., NMM.

⁴² Kemp, *Fisher Papers* v.2., pp. 331-5.

⁴³ Captain of the War College, E. J. W. Slade, “War With Germany.”, September 1, 1906, ADM 116/1036B, Case 0084. Reproduced (minus signature) in Case 0073, Section “War Plans, Opinions and Plans.”

⁴⁴ *Ibid*; Kemp, p. 347.

studies examined in War College/War Course games throughout 1905-06. His appraisals were influenced by his interest in the effect of naval wars on European politics and Austro-German affairs. It was well known within the War Course that these aspects had influenced war game scenarios.⁴⁵ It appears that the “Preamble” was included primarily as an appreciation to the President and the College for their assistance in the drafting of the main contingencies.

An amphibious advocate, like Corbett, Slade proposed seizing Borkum as an advanced base to control the Ems-Jade Canal should Britain intervene to prevent a German invasion of Holland or Belgium. The taking of a German/Dutch island might entice the High Seas Fleet out where it could be defeated by the British Fleet(s). He, however, ruled out “Copenhagen” attacks on Kiel or other fortified ports as too costly.⁴⁶ Similar operations to draw out the Germans included: a close watch on the High Seas Fleet, taking Sylt as an advanced base, and an expedition to Brunsbüttel at the mouth of the Elbe to threaten the Kiel Canal, should Germany absorb Austria-Hungary. Supplementary damage done to the Canal might allow the Royal Navy to pass into the Baltic, operate along the coast, and threaten an expedition on Berlin.⁴⁷ His scenarios repeated, almost verbatim, the NID’s July 1904 plan and the Ottley/Wilson designs from 1905. Those contingencies had mirrored 1900-05 German Admiralty Staff appreciations that a British foray into the Elbe or against Kiel had a likelihood of success.⁴⁸ The August/September 1906 German Naval Manoeuvres again simulated combined British operations against Kiel and attacks up the Elbe, Weser, and Ems.⁴⁹ In all likelihood, Slade and his staff consulted the NID Reports on the German

⁴⁵ “Royal Naval College.”, *Naval Review*, Vol. XLX, pp. 240-3.

⁴⁶ Kemp, *Fisher Papers* v.2., pp. 349-52.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 357-8.

⁴⁸ Refer to Chapter Two, above.

⁴⁹ “Germany. Manoeuvres, Exercises, &c. Combined Naval and Military Manoeuvres. August 23, 1906 and Autumn Manoeuvres, 1906. September 8-13, 1906.” NID Report, No. 834. September 1907, pp. 66-74., ADM 231/48, Nos. 819-854.

manoeuvres when compiling the War College games. The taking of Borkum as an advanced base was a recurring theme in the College's war games throughout 1905-06.⁵⁰ Only a few incidentals from the Preamble were included in the main plans. According to Ballard, Slade's input was limited to suggestions on the rough draft of each plan which resulted in "a few minor amendments only."⁵¹ The War College's contribution merely recapitulated offensive designs that had already passed muster at the NID and Admiralty. Like Corbett, Slade was "out of sync" with the main work of the Committee due to his advisory status, a point contrary to other interpretations which have overemphasized the War College role in the framing of the 1907 plans.⁵²

The "Introductory Remarks" outlined the premises, goals, and assumptions behind the Committee's four contingencies. Each plan dealt with the supposition of an Anglo-German war, with France either neutral or included as an active ally (Plans A1-D1). They all examined the most effective means of bringing direct pressure to bear on Germany. Since Britain lacked the land power to affect a decision, the Navy's "full capacity" would instead be employed against Germany's mercantile marine and commercial ports. A third objective included a large German army if Germany invaded Denmark and seized Zealand and Fyen. This latter scenario was attributable to the Scandinavian neutrality dilemma as it was "the opinion of some authorities" that Germany would attempt to control of the Belts at the onset of a conflict.⁵³ While the High Seas Fleet was not the "ultimate objective", its destruction was a "desirable" first step. German overseas commerce would, "doubtlessly regret its loss, but no immediate suffering would thereby be entailed upon the material commerce and industries, such as would arise from a stoppage of trade."⁵⁴ The plans were therefore predicated on the

⁵⁰ "Royal Naval War College", *Naval Review*, Vol. XIX., p. 241.

⁵¹ G.A. Ballard, "Remarks....", May 3, 1909, ADM 1/8997.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 316-7; Schurman, *Corbett*, pp. 66-7; N.Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, pp. 179-80.

⁵³ Kemp, *Fisher Papers* v.2.,pp. 362-3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 363.

degrees of pressure exerted to destroy, stop, or impair German maritime trade: Plan A/A1, the primary stage to invoke the destruction or “enforced idleness” of German shipping; Plan B/B1, a “rigorous [North Sea] blockade”; Plan C/C1, attacks on Baltic ports; Plan D/D1, combined operations to counter a German invasion of Denmark. The implementation of any of these options was left to the government, including exactly how far each plan would be modified to suit particular circumstances.⁵⁵

Near the end of the “Introductory Remarks”, the planners revealed the real motivations for the plans in two sections entitled: “The Political Status of the Baltic Entrances” and “Proposals for Effectively Closing the Mouth of the Elbe.” The status of the Baltic straits was “a matter of supreme importance in connection with any plans for conducting hostilities against Germany.” Given the “vague” position of the Belts, caused by the Norwegian neutrality issue, “considerable difficulties” negated any definite plan that might infringe Danish neutrality. The planners believed that the onus of drawing the Baltic entrances “into the actual sphere of operations” lay with a German violation of Denmark’s neutrality, “if we can contrive it.” Until the Great Belt’s status was resolved, no reliable campaign could be forwarded.⁵⁶

Evidence that themes from 1902-05, if not earlier, were continued was apparent as it was thought vital to eliminate the Kiel Canal’s interior advantage by “the necessity of being able to definitely obstruct the mouth of the Elbe”. Despite Ottley’s 1905 mine blockade proposals, mines were unreliable and nonpermanent obstructions. Since, “Our entire plan of campaign may be very largely dependent upon our power to do this [blocking the Elbe]”, the planners thought it may be imperative to sacrifice a hundred vessels to seal the Elbe.⁵⁷ Like the July 1904-1905 plans, this design appreciated that this option was a necessary precursor to offensive operations in the Baltic.

Plan A/A1 was, however, a significant departure from the Admiralty’s earlier

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 363-7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 370-1.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 371. Refer to Chapter Two above; *Anatomy*, pp. 479-80.

offensive designs. It was based on naval operations against Dutch trade in the seventeenth century which had forced the enemy fleets out to decisive defeat by the Royal Navy. Applied to modern conditions, German overseas trade could be crippled with minimal risk and difficulty through a distant North Sea blockade.⁵⁸ A cordon of 42 cruisers and 4 torpedo gunboats would block the northern North Sea exit: from Pentland Firth to the Orkneys, on to the Shetlands, and then towards the Norwegian coast. If Norway remained neutral, the cordon would end near Vaagsö Island, outside Norwegian territorial waters. Eight *Scouts* operating from Dover would seal the south-eastern English Channel from the South Goodwin Light to the Outer Ruytingen Shoals off the French coast. The North Sea was divided into two separate command areas on either side of a line extending from Newcastle to Lemvig in Denmark. The northern line was supported by 8 armoured cruisers and 36 destroyers based on the Forth with the Channel cordon augmented by an armoured cruiser, 49 destroyers/torpedo-boats, and 11 "B" Class submarines. When available, armed merchant cruisers would replace cruisers on the northern cordon and the latter despatched to hunt down German shipping that slipped through the blockade. The British battle fleet (51 battleships and 13 armoured cruisers) would be concentrated in the Humber to support either cordon and counter High Seas Fleet movements.⁵⁹ The blockade and central position of the British fleet would force the Germans out to defend their trade where they would be engaged after their Baltic line of retreat had been cut off.⁶⁰ A/A1 corresponded to the NID's 1902 North Sea studies which had recommended placing the Home Fleet in a centrally commanding position in the North Sea. The northern cordon repeated the northern "British" patrol line from the May 1902 NID/War College scenario.⁶¹

Plan A1 envisioned a French alliance and concentration of their main fleet in the

⁵⁸ Ballard, "Remarks....", May 3, 1909, ADM 1/8997, p. 4.

⁵⁹ Kemp, *Fisher Papers* v.2., pp. 362-93.

⁶⁰ Ballard, "Remarks....", ADM 1/8997, p. 4.

⁶¹ Refer to Chapter Two, above. pp. 54-5, footnotes 11, 15-17.

Mediterranean against Austria and Italy should either country maintain their Triple Alliance obligations and enter the war. The British Mediterranean fleet could then reinforce the Humber battle fleet and the North Sea cordon. France would protect allied Mediterranean interests, hunt down German shipping in that region, and establish the Channel cordon supported by a French submarine flotilla at Dover. A strong Cherbourg based fleet could support the British fleet in the North Sea.⁶² Assessing A/A1's impact, the planners believed that the blockade would have a "very considerable" impact upon German interests. Neutral trade alone was "insufficient" for Germany's needs since its commercial interests would have to pay abnormally high rates to divert the remaining 35% of the world's shipping tonnage (excluding 55% British and 10% German) to fulfill their requirements.⁶³

A/A1's economic lean was attributable to earlier evaluations of campaigns against an enemy's commercial interests. In 1905, Ottley had promoted both a mine and close blockade of Baltic and North Sea commercial ports as a means of curtailing Germany's overseas trade.⁶⁴ The DNI had outlined the Admiralty's economic guidelines for war in a policy paper for the 1907 Hague Conference entitled: "The Value to Great Britain of the Right of Capture of Neutral Vessels". Ottley and The Hague Committee agreed that neutrals should be allowed to trade freely during a conflict, although limits would be placed on the transport of enemy contraband. Britain's recourse included the blockade of an enemy's port and the capture/destruction of their shipping.⁶⁵ The theme of the Admiralty's June 1906 Manoeuvres simulated an enemy's *guerre de course*

⁶² Kemp, *Fisher Papers* v.2., pp. 393-4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 382-3.

⁶⁴ Refer to Chapter Two, above.

⁶⁵ Captain C.L. Ottley, "The Value to Great Britain of the Right of Capture of Neutral Vessels", 9 May., 1906, pp. 1-2., Fisher MSS, FISR 8/20, Churchill College, Cambridge; Offer, *First World War*, pp. 274-5.

against British trade.⁶⁶ Under A/A1, the dispersal of British fleets and loss of trade incurred during the manoeuvres could not occur as German movements outside the North Sea were restricted by the blockade cordons and the centrally concentrated Humber fleet. Not openly stated, the other influence on A/A1 was the Baltic entrances dilemma. A distant blockade strategy aimed at “sealing” the North Sea averted the possibility that the Royal Navy might be excluded from the Baltic by any Scandinavian neutrality agreement. The Committee planners had created a feasible alternative should future diplomatic endeavours fail to maintain the Baltic status quo.

Unlike A/A1, Plan B/B1 was not intended for implementation in the event of war. It retained the objective against German trade but did so via a close commercial blockade. Remarks prefacing the plan deprecated its impact compared to A/A1's distant blockade: “this plan would not add greatly to the punishment which Germany would suffer under Plans (A and A1), but it would much increase the risks we would incur ourselves.” B/B1 would only reduce German commerce “to a slightly greater extent than Plans (A and A1)...”. Risks attending the plan, such as the dispersal of the British battle fleet and its exposure to enemy attack, were not “desirable” unless it coincided with a “vigorous” general offensive against the entire German coast or included French assistance. B/B1 was expedient only if the government decided that the primary plans, A and C, could not bring Germany to terms. It represented: “a halfway step between these extremes, giving a minimum of result in proportion to the risks encountered.” Its purpose was to “demonstrate” the difficulties of a close blockade in comparison to A/A1 rather than “an approved plan of operations.”⁶⁷ B/B1 was only meant to validate the other contingencies--a factor overlooked in other evaluations of the 1907 War Plans.

B/B1 amalgamated the NID's 1902-04 plans, Ottley's July 1905 proposals, Slade's “Preamble”, and strategic themes from the 1890's. Germany's overseas trade

⁶⁶ “Detailed Programme and Rules of the Grand Manoeuvres, 1906.”, May 9, 1906 and Vice-Admiral William H. May (Umpire) to Admiralty, July 5, 1906, ADM 116/1001, Naval Trade Manoeuvres, 1905-1906, Case 444. Volumes 1-7; “Great Britain. Naval Manoeuvres. 1906”, NID Report No. 817, May 1907, ADM 231/47, Nos. 809-818.

⁶⁷ Kemp, pp. 395, 408.

would be attacked through a close blockade against principal commercial ports: Hamburg and Bremen on the North Sea; Danzig, Lübeck, and Königsberg in the Baltic. Two separate fleets would operate off the German North Sea estuaries and the Baltic approaches. To eliminate the Kiel Canal's interior advantage, the July 1904 Elbe plan was resurrected. Hulks were a more effective obstruction than mines which could be swept and necessitated a strong covering force to prevent their removal. As before, "sealing" the Elbe obviated the division of the main British fleet and effectively blocked Hamburg's entrance. With its western exit sealed, the German fleet could only exit through the Baltic where it could be advantageously engaged near the Skaw. Regarding the Scandinavian neutrality dispute, a clarification of Denmark's position was necessary: "in this matter of the status of the Great Belt it is most important to us to enunciate a definite line of national policy." Should Danish neutrality close the Belt, the British battle fleet would be relegated to the eastern Baltic during the day and forced to withdrawal to "a safe distance" at night to avoid German torpedo flotillas. The Baltic blockade would be maintained by an armoured cruiser squadron south of Fehmarn Island, supported by flotillas comprising *Rivers*, 30-knot destroyers, and submarines. Detached *Scout* squadrons would blockade eastern Baltic ports such as Swinemünde and Warnemünde. The western blockade would be conducted by unarmoured cruisers, torpedo-gunboats, and destroyers off the North Sea river entrances. B1 was contingent on the size of the French naval contribution given the political situation in the Mediterranean. If a considerable French naval force was available, they would blockade the eastern Baltic ports while the British conducted the Kiel and the North Sea blockades.⁶⁸

Along with the July 1904 plan and Ottley's 1905 proposals, B/B1 repeated earlier schemes for the establishment of advanced bases off an enemy's coast. The seizure of Borkum and Heligoland to support the North Sea blockade were projected, with preference given to the former due to the heavy defences on the other island. This

⁶⁸ Kemp, pp. 396-404, 409-13, 432.

repeated Slade's prescription in the Preamble and was detailed in three Appendices. Borkum would be taken and defended by a force of 3000 Royal Marines, supported by older *Royal Sovereign* battleships in a bombardment role.⁶⁹ The expedition's composition, defence arrangements, and the operation itself repeated Hankey's May 1904 "Advanced Bases for the Fleet" paper.⁷⁰ The planners, however, doubted B/B1's feasibility if the Elbe operation proved unsuccessful. If the Canal's exits remained open, the High Seas Fleet could strike against either of the blockading forces. Unless the plan was part of an "aggressive" campaign against the entire German North Sea littoral, and/or included French assistance, a close commercial blockade was, "more to be deprecated than ever".⁷¹ While B/B1's offensive orientation enhanced A/A1's distant blockade, the last two plans in the series were equally aggressive and concerned with retaining access to the Baltic entrances.

Plan C/C1 duplicated earlier contingencies and Fisher's "Copenhagen" pronouncements for a Baltic offensive. The plan escalated the pressure on German overseas commerce by advocating direct attacks on eastern Baltic ports. Although not stated, the main target was Germany's important Swedish iron-ore trade. Fisher, himself, was well aware of the vulnerability of this trade and the Baltic coasts.⁷² The destruction of Germany's Baltic harbours was a more viable enterprise than similar operations against North Sea ports which were located up tidal estuaries, were strongly defended and, "could only be bombarded under great tactical and strategic difficulties." Protected by isolated defensive works, the Baltic anchorages were, however, susceptible to naval gunfire. Compared to the North Sea littoral, there were no impediments to navigation in the open, tide-less Baltic which allowed "spotting ships" to direct the bombardment. Once the port defences were obliterated, all shipping, locks, and facilities

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 405-06; 418-32.

⁷⁰ Refer to Chapter Two, above; footnote 39.

⁷¹ Kemp, p. 408.

⁷² Refer to Chapter Two above, footnote 55.

could be destroyed. An attack on the Kiel Canal was ruled out due to the strength of the Cuxhaven-Kiel defences and extensive net/boom barriers that negated flotilla/submarine attacks on the Canal locks. In contrast to B, a bombardment of the Cuxhaven, Kiel, and Wilhelmshaven batteries was deemed “too formidable an undertaking”, needlessly jeopardising modern British battleships.⁷³

C/C1, however, retained the close blockade on the North Sea estuaries and the Elbe’s closure as vital preliminaries to any Baltic campaign. To support these operations, the seizure of Borkum and Sylt was again proposed along with the Baltic islands of Rügen and Fehmarn to support British flotillas off Kiel. If the High Seas Fleet did not counter the landings in the Baltic, it might be attacked in Kiel Fiord by torpedo flotillas and submarines preceded by “boom-breakers”. Once the Elbe and Borkum/Sylt expeditions had accomplished their objectives, the entire British fleet would proceed through the Great Belt. Dropping off the Kiel blockading squadron, the main fleet would then position itself east of the Fehmarn Belt to support the Kiel force. The eastern ports of Swinemünde, Neufahrwasser, and Pillau would be bombarded by the *Royal Sovereigns* and older “Special Service” battleships (i.e. *Trafalgar* Class). Once they were destroyed, flotilla attacks against the fleet at Kiel and the destruction of the Canal’s locks were possible options. Another provision involved large scale raids by 40,000 troops against the coastline from Kiel to Memel to tie down German forces. Like B1, C1 envisaged the French fleet’s deployment in the eastern Baltic if Mediterranean conditions were favourable.⁷⁴

Plan C/C1 continued the axiom developed during the 1890's and adopted in 1902-05--the offensive projection of naval power against an enemy’s most strategically vulnerable points. The planners retained this dictum, but since the target was Germany’s overseas commerce, they followed Ottley’s 1905 recommendations for a Baltic commercial campaign. Attacks on Kiel, the German Fleet, the Canal, and amphibious

⁷³ Kemp, pp. 432-4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 434-6.

expeditions, were all secondary objectives once Germany's Baltic ports (and the Swedish iron-ore trade) were eliminated. Within the Scandinavian neutrality context, a campaign against commercial interests in the Baltic was an expedient method of bringing overwhelming pressure to bear on Germany.

The last plan, Plan D/D1, was, like A/A1, a direct response to the Norwegian neutrality dilemma and the potential closure of the Belts. Ultimately, the design was influenced by the instability in the region, the Kaiser's 1902-05 *mare clausum* scheming, and warnings from the Foreign Office and Dumas that Germany intended to seize Denmark *en masse* at the outset of war: "Plans (D) and (D1) are based on the assumptions that those authorities are correct who believe that Germany contemplates an immediate occupation of Denmark on the outbreak of war.....".⁷⁵ Its primary objective entailed cutting the communications/supplies of German forces occupying Fyen and Zealand. Diplomatic uncertainties dictated two options. If the Danes supported German actions, all food imports into Zealand would be stopped. Should Denmark oppose an invasion, a British military expedition would be landed to force a German surrender. Landings could occur on Zealand's northwest corner, between Ise Fiord and Seirö Bay, which afforded ample accommodation, a secure line of advance, and clear fire support from the fleet. These operations were contingent on Plan C's implementation and an immediate close blockade of the Zealand coast. Combined operations to seize Sprongö and Omö Islands in the Great Belt and the Albue Peninsula were "necessary" to prevent German artillery from impeding the fleet's passage into the Baltic. As there was "no great difficulty" in occupying these areas, Royal Marines or a military force would be employed, supported by the *Royal Sovereigns* and older Special Service battleships. D1 repeated Plan C1, with French naval forces attacking the eastern Baltic ports, allowing the British to blockade Kiel and conduct operations around Zealand.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Kemp, p. 436.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 436-8.

Aspects of D were problematic, such as Denmark's diplomatic position and the Army's willing cooperation in amphibious operations. As preliminaries, D's amphibious proposals were identical to the Elbe proposal as a critical "linchpin", allowing the primary offensive (C/C1) to go forward. Like A/A1, the Danish operations were a flexible alternative, drafted specifically on the pretext that the Baltic might be closed to the Royal Navy. If the Belts were closed by force or a neutrality stipulation, D opened up the Baltic to C's assault on Germany's vulnerable eastern ports. Each plan was therefore highly dependant on the other for success and together consummated strategic axioms first developed in the 1890's.

Despite a declaration in the Preamble's introduction that: "The opinions and plans herein....are not in any way to be those definitively adopted except where that is expressedly stated,...." ⁷⁷, ship dispositions for Plans C-D indicated how serious the planners were about potential operations around Denmark and in the eastern Baltic. Some believe that the elaborate ship lists in the Appendices to Plans A-D are proof that the plans were concocted solely to thwart criticism that the Admiralty lacked an effective plan for war against Germany.⁷⁸ Closer attention to the actual vessels comprising the flotillas assigned to Baltic operations reveals, however, that these were legitimate distributions for the plans' offensive parameters. The flotilla arrangements for C-D matched the earlier reorganisation of Home Fleet flotillas in April-June 1906.⁷⁹ Under Plans C-D's arrangements, powerful, long-range *River* Class destroyers were assigned to Baltic flotillas to counter German torpedo-craft attempting to disrupt British operations in the vicinity of the Belts and against Germany's eastern ports.⁸⁰ The ongoing Norwegian neutrality dilemma, Channel/Home Fleet manoeuvres, and a change in the Navy's procurement policy also proved the viability of the Ballard Committee's

⁷⁷ ADM 116/1043B, Part 1, Volume 1, War Plans 1907-1908, Case #0073.

⁷⁸ Kemp, p. 317.

⁷⁹ Refer to footnotes 23-4, above.

⁸⁰ "Plans (C) and (D)-Appendix I.", Kemp, pp. 438-42.

plans had war with Germany become a likelihood before 1914.

IV.

Concurrent with the Committee's work (December 1906-May 1907), the Foreign Office and Admiralty worked to forestall any neutrality agreement which entailed the Baltic's closure. Eyre Crowe, Foreign Office Senior Clerk (1906-12), expressed trepidation over an extended neutrality including Denmark and Sweden. Such an agreement repeated the 1780 "Armed Neutrality" and a 1794 Swedish-Danish treaty, which were aimed at closing the Baltic to British warships.⁸¹ In February 1907, Sir Charles Hardinge, Foreign Office Permanent Under-Secretary (1906-10), stated that a Scandinavian neutrality compact might not prevent a German invasion of Denmark and the closure of the Belts. Unless the European Powers guaranteed Danish neutrality, Britain's only recourse lay in recognising Scandinavian neutrality and a defensive alliance between Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Such an alliance was doubtful, however, since the Danes and Swedes expressed little support for neutralisation.⁸² Ottley expressed the Admiralty's position at a 21st February 1907 CID meeting. Norway's neutrality was a potential handicap in an Anglo-German war if Denmark's neutrality was not also assured. If Germany occupied Denmark and closed the Belts, Britain would have to seize a Norwegian port, possibly Christiansand, to maintain a watch on the Skagerrak.⁸³ Since the 1907 contingencies included Norway as the eastern "anchor" for A/A1's distant blockade and C's attacks on Baltic ports/trade, Ottley verified that free access into the Baltic was the cornerstone of the Navy's strategic policy against Germany.

The connection between neutrality, naval planning, and the Baltic entrances was reiterated by Dumas. In early March 1907, the Naval Attaché stressed the "immense importance" of Britain reaching "a full and clear understanding" with Denmark and

⁸¹ Sweet, p. 462, footnote 44.

⁸² Hardinge, "Memorandum on the Question of Danish Neutrality and the Free Navigation of the Straits giving access to the Baltic.", February 18, 1907, *BD VIII*, No. 91., pp. 107-08.

⁸³ Minutes of the 95th meeting of the CID, 21 February 1907, CAB 2/2: Salmon, p. 72.

Sweden over the passage of belligerent warships into the Baltic. Dumas echoed the Ballard Committee that the most effective means of bringing Germany “to book” lay in the destruction of its overseas commerce, ports, fleet, and strategic assets such as Kiel and the Canal. Operations against these targets could only occur in the Baltic due to the strength of the defences at Cuxhaven and Brunsbüttel, the same realisation expressed in Plan C/C1. Dumas repeated his February 1906 argument that the government consider supporting any Danish/Swedish proposals to deepen the Sound as an alternative route into the Baltic.⁸⁴ The Foreign Office/Admiralty position was that the straits remain open to the passage of all ships. Any attempt to close them would be a violation of neutrality which might include Denmark or Sweden as Germany’s ally in any future conflict.⁸⁵ Clearly, Dumas’s interpretation and the Foreign Office appraisals, *vis-a-vis* the Belts and Sound, equated with Plan C’s Baltic offensive. If a Scandinavian agreement or a German invasion of Denmark overturned the “status quo”, Plans A and D gave the Admiralty flexible contingencies to pursue a campaign against Germany’s overseas trade.

Concerns over the Baltic channels included reducing Scandinavian suspicions regarding British policy. Sir Edward Grey’s decision to “hush-up” on Denmark was motivated by advocates on the British side, such as Dumas, who supported a secret Anglo-Danish arrangement to secure access into the Baltic.⁸⁶ The Foreign Secretary’s efforts were nearly undermined by Fisher’s reaction to a potential German-Danish compact to close the Baltic. In a frank discussion with the Norwegian Minister, Nansen, Fisher warned that if Germany occupied Denmark and closed the Belts, Britain would quickly occupy a Norwegian port (Christiansand) as a Skagerrak base.⁸⁷ This repeated

⁸⁴ Sir F. Lascelles to Sir Edward Grey, March 7, 1907 with Enclosure: Captain Dumas to Sir F. Lascelles, March 6, 1907, *BD VIII*, No. 104., pp. 122-30.

⁸⁵ Minutes by Sir Charles Hardinge and Sir Edward Grey on Dumas to Lascelles, March 6, 1907, *BD VIII*, No. 104, p. 129.

⁸⁶ Sweet, pp. 462-3.

⁸⁷ Lindberg., pp 65-6; Sweet, p. 464, endnote 60; Salmon, pp. 72-3.

Ottley's February disclosure to the CID and confirmed the crucial importance of the Belts and Norway in the Admiralty's Baltic strategy. Fisher's outburst was nullified by a joint Admiralty-Foreign Office reaffirmation of their Norwegian policy at the CID in April. The Defence Committee openly endorsed the position that neutrality applied to Norway alone was "impracticable".⁸⁸ It was no coincidence that the Foreign Office/Admiralty initiatives regarding Norway and the Baltic entrances coincided with the final stages of the Ballard Committee's deliberations in January-May 1907.

In June 1907, the Russian Foreign Minister, Alexander Isvolsky, forwarded a counter-draft eliminating the clause on a general Scandinavian reservation and offered instead a guarantee limited to Norway's independence, integrity, and neutrality. France, Germany, and, Norway, all supported the Russian formula; a development contrary to Britain's policy. The British government had to accept a neutrality agreement inimical to its strategic interests in the Baltic or become the only power opposed to the proposal.⁸⁹ Russia's desire to abrogate the Åland Islands servitude of 1856 and re-fortify the islands, however, presented a way out. The linkage of Norwegian neutrality with the Åland issue gave Grey the pretext to veto the Russian treaty on the grounds that the islands' re-fortification would transform Sweden into a "Russian Grand Duchy". If Sweden submitted to Russian domination of the eastern Baltic or turned to Germany for protection, the Baltic could become a "Russo-German lake." The only means of resolving the entire Baltic problem lay in a meeting of the four Great Powers to revise the 1855-6 Treaties.⁹⁰ Grey's stance forced Isvolsky to reject the idea of a conference since Russia wanted to prevent any further British interference in Baltic matters. The Foreign Office countered the Russian draft by advocating a separate Norwegian guarantee, but strictly in reference to the preservation of "integrity" not "neutrality".

⁸⁸ 97th Meeting of the CID, April 25, 1907, Minutes., CAB 2/2.

⁸⁹ Sir A Nicholson to Sir Edward Grey, June 19, 1907, *BD VIII*, No. 94, pp. 112-5; Sweet, p. 464.

⁹⁰ Sir Francis Bertie to Sir Edward Grey, July 9, 1907, *BD VIII*, No. 106., pp. 130-1.; Salmon, pp. 72-3; Sweet, pp. 465-6..

Despite a suspicion of British designs on Norwegian ports in wartime, Norway, Russia, and Germany all agreed to Grey's stipulations for an integrity agreement--Germany had to follow Russia to avoid becoming the sole opponent to the agreement. The Swedes were the only "hold-out" to the treaty, viewing the agreement as antithetic to their interests. Their suspicion of British motives delayed the treaty's finalisation until 2nd November, 1907.⁹¹ This was not, however, the end of the Scandinavian "status quo" question nor Foreign Office/Admiralty attempts to secure the Navy's free passage into the Baltic. Diplomatic debate over the Baltic situation, and Admiralty planning, persisted into 1908.

V.

Validation of the 1907 plans came in other guises. Upon completion, Fisher passed them to the former C-in-C Channel Fleet, Sir Arthur Wilson, for his observations and criticisms. The request and Wilson's May 1907 draft, "Remarks on the War Plans", corresponded with heightened furor over Norway and rumours of a possible Danish-German alliance to close the Belts. Judging from his intimation to Nansen in April, Fisher likely sought Wilson's input due to the growing uncertainty over the Baltic straits. The latter's survey of the Ballard Committee's work contained no serious criticism of the main plans and reiterated his and Ottley's June/July 1905 schemes. Dismissing Corbett's introduction as "general principles", Wilson outlined the same potential cases for war covered in Plans A-D: an Anglo-German war and France allied with Britain. Under the first condition, there were two options: "To endeavour to stop the enemy from coming out of his harbours at all", and to tempt the High Seas Fleet out to its destruction. Since a "close continuous watch off all the Germans ports" was "very difficult and costly to maintain", Wilson believed these operations, outlined in Plans B and C, would not effect German trade. Germany would merely make up its deficits through neutral shipping or over land routes.⁹²

⁹¹ Salmon, pp. 73-5.

⁹² Sir Arthur K. Wilson, "Remarks on the War Plans.", (May 1907), in Kemp, pp. 454-6; ADM 116/1043B, Part 1; FISR 5/13, No. 4231. Churchill College, Cambridge.

Supporting Borkum's seizure to watch the Ems, Wilson warned that close "watches" off the German North Sea estuaries were still liable to attack by superior force and were difficult to maintain at night. Replacing the close blockade, the Straits of Dover would be blocked by destroyers and submarines. Two fleets based either in Ireland or western Scotland and at Channel bases would conduct periodic "sweeps" of the North Sea; their objective to draw out the German fleet and cut it off from its bases. During the imminent war period, "Destroyers alone need be in the North Sea." Supported by *Scouts* and armoured cruisers, destroyer "watches", could be conducted off the North Sea littoral and near the Skaw to warn of German fleet sorties. Without allies, it was futile to launch major amphibious operations anywhere along Germany's coasts but transports should be provisioned for possible raids to tie down German forces.⁹³ While stressing the destruction of the enemy fleet over trade, Wilson's proposals repeated A's basic tenets with the inclusion of a more offensive aspect (i.e.) North Sea "sweeps".

In an Anglo-French war against Germany, Wilson repeated his June 1905 views against an economic campaign. Britain could only provide "serious assistance to France" through "a floating army" launching diversionary raids on the German coast. These raids would be "carried out with a certain recklessness of life and yet not pushed so far as to risk being cut off entirely", to divert German resources from an attack on France. His principal operation was similar to the July 1904 plan, his June 1905 proposals, and Plans B-C. A direct attack would be made up the Elbe by a run past the Cuxhaven defences to block the western end of the Kiel Canal and threaten Hamburg--the same operation ruled out in C as far too dangerous and costly. Supported by a fleet of *Majestic* and *Albion* Class battleships, a "River Squadron", of *Royal Sovereigns* and other Special Service ships, equipped with "cow catchers" to keep off mines, would force its way up the Elbe. This squadron would blast its way past the Cuxhaven forts and endeavour to sink the German fleet in the Elbe with torpedoes and ram. Should the

⁹³ Kemp, pp. 456-9.

German fleet be absent, the squadron would attempt to destroy the Canal locks or secure the area.⁹⁴

In addition, Wilson advocated landings to support the Cuxhaven operations. A force of 200,000 troops (mostly French) would conduct diversionary feints by appearing off the Skaw and threatening a landing at Büsum. Troops assigned to the Elbe operation would advance up the Weser and attempt a landing near Imsum to seize the railway and prevent German reinforcements from reaching Cuxhaven. The main expedition, supported by the fleet, would land at Neufeld or Altenbrück to block German reinforcements from the south. If the force maintained its position, the Cuxhaven forts could be destroyed/captured by a combined attack by the fleet and troops from the rear. Amphibious forays in the Baltic could only go ahead after the Elbe operation had completed its objective. If forces were available, troops could be moved into the Baltic to threaten Kiel and Stettin. Fehmarn and Alsen would be seized as advanced bases to support the destroyers needed to guard against German flotilla attack and conduct combined operations off Kiel and Lubeck Bay.⁹⁵ The second part of Wilson's survey maintained the axiom, stressed again in the war plans, that the closure of the Canal's western exit was a necessary precursor to any Baltic operations. Wilson provided two alternative strategies, roughly the same as the Ballard Committee's primary Plans A and C: one based on the possibility that the Baltic entrances might be closed to the Royal Navy; the other a vital preliminary to any naval offensive against Germany's vulnerable points in the Baltic.

Channel/Home Fleets manoeuvres also verified that the 1907 plans were taken seriously. Channel Fleet and Fifth Cruiser Squadron tactical exercises in late June-early July 1907, examined a close watch on an enemy's main ports as outlined under Plans B and C. The first exercise would determine: "whether it is possible to maintain a force of Destroyers supported by cruisers off an enemy's coast which contains the enemy's

⁹⁴ "Secret, Wilson to Fisher", March 9, 1906, FISR 1/5, No. 195., Fisher MSS, Churchill College; Kemp, pp. 460-1.

⁹⁵ Kemp, pp. 461-3.

principal base, the Destroyer's base being over 150 miles from this principal base." The scenario simulated flotillas operating off Germany's North Sea estuaries or Kiel as detailed in B-C and Wilson's "Remarks". The task assigned to "X" (British) Fleet, commanded by Rear-Admiral George Callaghan, and comprising the Fifth Cruiser Squadron, *Scouts*, and destroyers, was to watch "C" fleet and report its movements to a fictional main fleet. "C" Fleet (German), the Channel Fleet, commanded by its C-in-C, Admiral Lord Charles Beresford (1906-09), would attempt to leave its base at Portland unobserved and evade "X's" main fleet to carry out an unspecified "undertaking". "X" failed to monitor "C"'s progress, while Beresford missed an opportunity to destroy the principal "British" cruiser squadron.⁹⁶

Exercise II, 1st-3rd July, corresponded to C/C1's parameters for an observational force off the Skaw preventing a German sortie from Kiel before a British Baltic advance. The scenario's object involved watching an enemy's base, some 150 miles distant, with a battle fleet, attendant cruisers, *Scouts*, and destroyer flotillas. Beresford again commanded "C" Fleet (German), with "X" (British) commanded by the former DNI, Vice-Admiral Sir Reginald Custance, Second-in-Command Channel Fleet. "C" Fleet was nearly equal to the blockading force but weaker in cruisers and destroyers, which conformed to the High Seas Fleet's strength compared to the Royal Navy. The exercise would terminate once Beresford successfully crossed one of two meridians without being brought to action by "X". Beresford attained his goal when Custance over-extended his patrol line (and communications) too far to the northward. The exercise's tactical lessons included the proper destroyer dispositions for blockade lines, improved crew training for these operations, and the need for increased practice between destroyers and heavier units. This last recommendation was "all important" since British flotillas would bear the "brunt" of the action in the early phases of a war

⁹⁶ Tactical Exercises Channel Fleet, 5th Cruiser Squadron. *Scouts and Destroyers*, June-July 1907, Exercise I, 24 June-27 June 1907, ADM 1/7926. From Admiral "D" Channel Fleet., 669-End, 1908.

with Germany.⁹⁷

The final exercise examined a blockaded fleet attempting a torpedo attack on its opponent before sortieing from its base. Retaining their roles, “X” (British) had to prevent “C’s” (German) passage from Queensferry, (Wilhelmshaven, the Elbe) through the northern straits around Scotland, to its main base at Aberdeen, simulating an “enclosed” harbour with a North East entrance (Kiel). “X” was inferior in destroyers, but attempted to prevent “C’s” flotillas at Aberdeen from attacking the fleet. The scenario equated with Plan C’s proposed “watch” on the Elbe and Kiel and simulated a German fleet’s attempt to move from the Elbe around Denmark to Kiel. The Canal was not included in the simulation. While “X’s” dispositions prevented “C” from passing through the northern strait unmolested, Beresford’s destroyers slipped out of Aberdeen undetected and found “X” Fleet. His observations repeated earlier assessments of a close watch on enemy’s port: “To maintain even this proportion, viz. half the number inside, off an enemy’s base at a distance will require probably from two to three times the number of sea-going Destroyers able to keep the sea in the average weather that may be anticipated.”⁹⁸ The exercise had not, however, included the advanced base option to support “British” flotillas outlined in the war plans nor Fisher’s suggested seizure of a Norwegian port to support operations in the Skagerrak/Kattegat. The exercises again revealed the necessity of keeping the longer range *Rivers* in separate flotillas from the *30-knot* boats to enhance operations off an enemy’s coast as outlined under Plan C’s Baltic dispositions.⁹⁹

The strategic portion of the combined Fleet Manoeuvres (Channel, Home, Atlantic) in late October 1907 repeated the last exercise from July and directly corresponded to the Admiralty war plans. Its objective was a watch on an enemy fleet

⁹⁷ Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet. Exercise II, 1 July-3 July, 1907, C-in-C’s Observations on Exercise II; C-in-C Channel Fleet to Admiralty, August 1, 1907, *Ibid*.

⁹⁸ Tactical Exercises. Channel Fleet. Third Exercise, 8th to 10th July 1907, C-in-C’s Observations on the First Phase of the Third Exercise., ADM 1/7926.

⁹⁹ C-in-C Channel Fleet to Admiralty, Tactical Exercises. 24th June-10th July 1907. “Remarks on the performance of Destroyers.”, August 23, 1907, *Ibid*.

using two protected bases: one situated on the coast under observation, the other approachable through a narrow passage 145 miles from the entrance of a strait. A secondary objective evaluated the proper deployment for destroyers with their base 250 miles from enemy territory. The scenario simulated Plan B-C's provisions for a British inshore "watch" off the Elbe and a distant observation of Kiel from near the Skaw. "X" Fleet's (German) bases at Stornoway and Cromarty represented Wilhelmshaven and Kiel respectively, the northern point of the Orkneys served as the Skaw, and Pentland Firth mimicked the Kiel Canal. The distance between "C" Fleet's (British) base at Queensferry and Cromarty approximated the distance between Dover and the German North Sea coast—an endurance simulation for British flotillas operating off the Elbe, Weser, and Ems. Unlike the June-July exercises, "C" fleet had liberty to use any base in X's territory for coaling and re-supply, including the establishment of "temporary" or advanced bases as outlined under Plans B-D. "X" Fleet's objective (Custance), was either to cross the meridian of 4° East, south of Parallel 60° North; threaten to land troops on "C"'s territory; or attack seagoing trade. Commanding the superior fleet, Beresford would prevent "X" from accomplishing its objectives which could only occur by the location and destruction of Custance's forces.¹⁰⁰

"C" Fleet's organisation also conformed to the war plans, for its 1st and 3rd Destroyer Flotillas (mostly *Rivers*) were the same dispositions as outlined in the Appendix to Plans C-D with these British flotillas relegated to blockade operations off Kiel.¹⁰¹ Time restrictions, however, meant that neither side accomplished their stated aims.¹⁰² Although Beresford's observations on the Manoeuvre indicated the "

¹⁰⁰ October 1907 Manoeuvres. Commander-in-Chief The Nore., October 12, 1907; Beresford to Noel, HMS *King Edward VII*, Channel Fleet, 11 October, 1907; Flag Lieutenant Bernard Buxton, HMS *Albemarle*, Atlantic Fleet to Admiral Noel, October 22, 1907, NOE/11B, Noel MSS, NMM.

¹⁰¹ October 1907 Manoeuvres. "Composition of Opposing Fleets.", p. 6., *Ibid*; Kemp, *Fisher Papers* v.2., p. 438-41.

¹⁰² Flag Lieutenant B. Buxton to Noel, October 22, 1907, NOE/11B, NMM; G.A. Ballard, "Remarks....", April-May, 1909, p. 8-9., ADM 1/899.

impossibility” of having an inshore watching squadron, his tactical critique proved another platform to attack the Admiralty over a lack of cruisers and destroyers.¹⁰³ The strategic lessons of the October Manoeuvres were inconclusive, but the exercise again verified that parameters of the 1907 plans, particularly Plan C’s Baltic/North Sea operations, were viewed as serious considerations.

Concern over East Coast coaling and torpedo bases also indicated that aspects of the Ballard Committee plans were deemed legitimate by the Admiralty. Frequent North Sea cruises gave the C-in-C Channel ample exposure to existing facilities at the principal East Coast ports and their suitability for wartime operations. In early August, Beresford outlined the benefits and shortcomings of eastern ports and made several recommendations. Based on the distance to the Ems (Borkum Light) and the main German exit north of the Elbe, he identified three suitable anchorages for North Sea operations: the Humber, the Forth (Rosyth), and Cromarty. Out of these, the Humber was the best positioned “strategically”, but was geographically indefensible against enemy torpedo craft and thus useless as a fleet base. As Cromarty was too far north, Beresford suggested Rosyth as the main fleet coaling base. He recommended that the Board consider: improving the Forth’s defences, Cromarty as an alternate, Grimsby’s development, and the Humber’s employment as a flotilla base. The DNI and Admiralty concurred with Beresford’s analysis and recommendations, adding Scapa Flow as another potential main base in the North Sea.¹⁰⁴

Following Beresford’s suggestions, the Admiralty informed the War Office of their intention to establish protected East Coast coaling bases. As, “any naval conflict in which we may be engaged will probably be decided chiefly in the North Sea”, the Board needed the Army Council to consider the erection and improvement of defences

¹⁰³ C-in-C Channel Fleet to Admiralty, June 1, 1908, “Second Plan of Action for British Fleet”, ADM 116/1037B.

¹⁰⁴ C-in-C Channel Fleet to Admiralty, 1st August, 1907; Admiralty to C-in-C. HM Ships and Vessels, Channel Fleet, 23 September 1907, “Coaling Bases and Torpedo Bases on East Coast of England.” War Office, February 6, 1908, ADM 1/8030, Admiralty. War Office. 1908. November-December.

at the Humber, Rosyth, Invergordon, and Scapa Flow. Their Lordships regretted that this overturned the Owen Committee's 1905 recommendations, "but as they consider that for the efficiency of their war plans a defended coaling anchorage in northern waters is essential", a revision of the defences at the Forth/Rosyth was required. The Fleet would need to coal in safety, north of Sheerness, due to the "high degree of organisation" of the German torpedo flotillas--a veiled allusion that the Admiralty "war plans" conformed to A/A1's distant blockade, Wilson's North Sea "sweeps", and "watches" near the German littoral and the Skaw.¹⁰⁵

The connection between East Coast bases and the war plans was also confirmed by the C-in-C, Home Fleet, Vice-Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman. In November, Bridgeman informed the Admiralty that he concurred in Commodore (T)'s, Lewis Bayly's, assessment that destroyer bases be established at Granton, Grimsby, and Harwich "in the event of war with a North Sea or Baltic Power". Supported by *Scouts*, flotillas operating from these bases would be in a position to "be off the mouth of the Elbe, the Weser, and the Ems as soon as we can (the Elbe also covering the Kiel Canal), and also to guard the Skagerrak." Analogous to C/C1's proposed watch on the German North Sea estuaries and the Skagerrak/Kattegat, the distances for destroyers operating from Harwich and Grimsby to the Weser Light Ship were some 250-270 miles. It was expedient to base *Scouts* and two flotillas at Granton to assist in the cruiser "guard" on the Skagerrak (detailed in C/C1). These flotillas could patrol the Skagerrak in the vicinity of Christiansand Fiord, some 380 miles from base. After seizing Borkum, Bridgeman and Bayly suggested despatching a depot ship to Vooren Tief, northeast of the island, to resupply and coal destroyers watching the German North Sea coast. The six Harwich and Grimsby based flotillas could then relieve each other in 48 hour shifts working from the Elbe to Borkum, with one third always being coaled and watered north of the island. Leaving the Forth, the Granton flotillas could establish themselves at Lister Deep, north of Sylt Island, for operations in the Skagerrak. Noting that many

¹⁰⁵ Admiralty to the Secretary of the War Office, 23rd September, 1907, *Ibid*.

of Bridgeman's suggestions were in place or under consideration, the new DNI, Slade (1907-09), regarded the flotilla distributions as "excellent" but ultimately dependant upon Borkum's seizure; the very proposal outlined in his "Preamble" and Plans B/B1-C/C1.¹⁰⁶

The provision for inshore support vessels required by the 1907 plans was considered before the Ballard Committee's deliberations. At an April 1906 Institute of Naval Architects meeting, Admiral C.C. P. Fitzgerald outlined non-secret details of the existing *Scout* class. His paper and the ensuing discussion addressed the merits and shortcomings of current *Scouts* compared to Fitzgerald's original 1901 design and "worked" out by the DNC, Sir Philip Watts (1902-1912).¹⁰⁷ There was considerable debate on the current type's value regarding armament, speed, range, and endurance. Custance, an Associate Member of the Institute, thought the original design lacked sufficient armament and was too fast for fleet reconnaissance and inshore work against enemy destroyers. Others supported the *Scout* concept, but believed that armoured cruisers were also suitable for certain scouting tasks. All members unanimously agreed that the coal supply and range of the existing *Scouts* was inadequate. Future vessels would have to be larger and carry a greater coal supply for long range operations with or separate from the fleet.¹⁰⁸

Shortly after this meeting and the March-April 1906 home flotilla redistribution, the Admiralty considered replacing its older unarmoured cruisers with the *Scout* class derivative discussed in Fitzgerald's paper. At a 26th May Board meeting on future shipbuilding requirements, the Controller (Third Sea Lord), Rear-Admiral Sir Henry B. Jackson, stressed the "importance" of providing vessels as "Parent Ships" for destroyers. These new "fourth type" cruisers would approximate the *Scouts* in

¹⁰⁶ C-in-C Home Fleet to Admiralty, 21st November, 1907, including Chart and Cover Minutes by DNI, ADM 1/8030, Admiralty. War Office. 1908. November-December.

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter One, footnotes 133-4.

¹⁰⁸ "The New Scouts." by Admiral C.C.P. Fitzgerald, presented at the 47th session of the Institution of Naval Architects, April 4, 1906, *Transactions. Institute of Naval Architects*, Vol. XLVIII, 1906., pp. 1-18.

dimension and assume the inshore roles hitherto assigned to the old Torpedo Gunboats, now too slow and obsolescent for modern requirements. The Board concurred in Jackson's recommendation that the first vessel of this type be laid down at Pembroke in April 1907.¹⁰⁹

The push for new scouting cruisers as "parent ships" for destroyer flotillas continued into 1907. In a 7th January memorandum by Ottley, the argument for a fast light cruiser was laid out. Until a replacement for the older unarmoured cruisers was found, "We are, therefore, driven back on the alternative of employing armoured cruisers for scouting, reconnaissance work, and cruiser work in general in blue water, reserving the rôle of inshore cruiser work entirely for that essentially modern evolution of tactical necessities, the ocean-going destroyer and its derivatives, such as the British "Scouts" pending the evolution of a more satisfactory type."¹¹⁰ Careful not to deride the administration's programme to scrap the Navy's older unarmoured cruisers, Ottley argued that the current possession of a sizeable "mosquito fleet" of fast craft enabled Britain, "to press home its investigations off enemy's ports fronting upon the *Narrow Seas* and *German Ocean*, with a well grounded confidence that, if chased, it may show a clean pair of heels to an enemy in superior force." The projected cruiser (HMS *Boadicea*) to be laid down at Pembroke was the forerunner of the new class which would meet "the tactical necessities" for "future naval warfare."¹¹¹ Indirectly, the DNI had implied the duties and the locales where the new types, the *Boadicea* Class Scout Cruisers, would be deployed: observational and flotilla support operations along the

¹⁰⁹ "Memorandum of a Meeting of the Sea Lords at the Admiralty on Saturday, 26th May, 1906. To consider future shipbuilding Arrangements, &c.-held in accordance with the wishes of the First Lord, to consider and advise him as to possible reductions.", pp. 122-5, Thursfield MSS, THU/2/2, Letters and Printed Material sent by Fisher, NMM.

¹¹⁰ "The Strategic Aspect of Our Building Program, 1907.", C.L. Ottley, January 7, 1907, p. 25. Richmond MSS, RIC/4/2/a3, NMM.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-5.

German North Sea coast and in the Baltic.¹¹²

Fisher, too, affirmed the need for new cruisers for inshore operations. Writing to James R. Thursfield, *The Times* Naval Correspondent, he explained the primary function of the *Boadicea* as, “Parent Vessel to Destroyers for the work of the inshore Squadron.” He reiterated that the new type would not be a “rehabilitation” of the old unprotected cruiser policy, the “bug-traps”, but would fulfill the role of “backer-up” to flotillas engaged in inshore work on an enemy’s coast.¹¹³ While the Admiralty’s commitment to improved scout cruisers began before the 1907 plans, this switch in procurement policy coincided with the Scandinavian “status quo” dilemma and the final stage of the Ballard Committee’s deliberations. The sudden drive to equip flotillas with “parent” vessels for “inshore” operations, belied the fact that the main strategic axioms underpinning the 1907 War Plans were accepted Admiralty policy, even before their completion in April/May. British diplomacy during the Norwegian crisis, Wilson’s “Remarks”, Channel/Home Fleet manoeuvres, the East Coast base issue, and procurement all confirmed the legitimacy of the Ballard Committee’s designs as potential operations in a war with Germany. The 1907 plans were the paradigm for further planning aimed at preserving the Royal Navy’s prerogatives in the Baltic. Like the Ballard Committee’s work, these new contingencies maintained the same themes developed in the 1880’s-90’s and were motivated by the same strategic concerns.

¹¹² R. Gray (ed), *Conway’s All the World’s Fighting Ships, 1906-1921.*, (London, 1992), pp. 50-1.

¹¹³ Fisher to James R. Thursfield, ‘Confidential’, (March?), 1907, Thursfield MSS, THU/2/6, Some Letters (Fisher) to the First Lord and remarks on Admiralty Policy, NMM.

Chapter Four: War Planning, 1908-1909.

I.

The Admiralty's first "official" operational planning was prompted by the realization that a future Anglo-German war was a likelihood due to the High Seas Fleet's growth and Germany's attempts to break the diplomatic alignment of the *Entente* in 1905-06. The Royal Navy's strategy focussed on offensive inshore, blockade, and amphibious operations in the North Sea and, particularly, the Baltic as the only viable avenues where naval power could exert direct pressure on Germany. The plans were also byproducts of the Norwegian/Scandinavian *status quo* dilemma, reflecting Admiralty/Foreign Office concerns that regional neutrality agreements or compacts could effectively close the Belts and Sound. This would hamper an offensive against Germany itself. Increased opposition to Fisher's policies in 1908-09, principally from the C-in-C Channel Fleet Lord Charles Beresford, created an environment antithetical to the establishment of a proper naval staff. As Fisher's paranoia over Beresford increased, he entrenched the Admiralty's strategic processes firmly under his prerogative and away from his Service opponents.

The April 1908 Baltic and North Sea *status quo* agreements, the Casablanca Crisis (September to November 1908), and Austria's annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in late 1908-early 1909 also motivated the need for supplemental war plans. The co-existence of the Fisher-Beresford "row" and new plans for a possible Anglo-German conflict has created the impression that the Fisher regime's operational studies were unrealistic "showpieces" produced solely to confound the First Sea Lord's opponents.¹ Although there has been one serious examination of the "W" series plans and related studies of the 1907-08 Baltic *status quo* issue, none has convincingly linked the Admiralty's 1908 war plans to the debate over the status of the Baltic entrances.²

¹ Haggie, "War Planning", pp. 118-130; Kemp, *Fisher Papers* v.2, pp. 316-7; N. Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, pp. 180-1.

² Summerton, "British Military Planning", Chapter Five, pp. 223-97. Also refer to: Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 365-75, 401-7; Williamson, *Grand Strategy*, pp. 104-7; Salmon, *Scandinavia*, pp. 71-

The Foreign Office's Scandinavian diplomacy and the Admiralty's planning clarified that each influenced the other and verify that the "W" series continued the Ballard Committee's work and earlier NID proposals from 1902, if not earlier.

The validity of the Admiralty's operational planning was again evident through procurement, manoeuvres/exercises, and other studies. In form, substance, and style, the 1908 plans continued the 1906-07 contingencies and repeated many of their internal foibles. This occurred because strategic questions were compartmentalised within the War College and separated from the true planning department, the NID. Despite this shift, the Admiralty's strategy centred on Germany's North Sea littoral and the Baltic as part of Fisher's offensive deterrent against Germany and to secure free access into the Baltic in pursuit of that aim.³

Even with the Ballard Committee war plans and the success of Fisher's *matériel* reforms, his administration came under increasing attack in the summer of 1907. By July-August, Beresford's opposition to the creation of the Home Fleet intensified despite Admiralty remonstrances of its authority. Inaction by the Cabinet and First Lord, Lord Tweedmouth (1906-08), allowed the growing "feud" to expand publically after the November "paintwork" dispute between Beresford and the commander of the Channel Fleet's First Cruiser Division, Rear-Admiral Sir Percy Scott.⁴ Fisher's problems intensified with the CID's Invasion Inquiry (November 1907-July 1908). Questions surrounding the Navy's ability to prevent a German "bolt from the blue" forwarded by

82, 85-93; Sweet, "The Baltic", pp. 451-90; and Brian Bond, "British War Planning for Operations in the Baltic before the First and Second World Wars", in Rystad, Böhme, Carlgren, *In Quest of Trade and Security Vol.2.*, pp. 107-38. Neither Salmon, Sweet, nor Bond, however, examine the 1908 "W" series plans in any detail nor links to British diplomacy over the Baltic/North Sea *status quo* agreements.

³ Lambert, "Great Britain and the Baltic, 1890-1914", pp. 1-22.

⁴ "Correspondence Relating to War Orders and Position of C-in-C Channel Fleet (Lord Charles Beresford), May 1907-March 1908.", ADM116/1037, Case 1697; "Signal made by Rear-Admiral Sir Percy Scott.... 'to paint ship'..", ADM 1/7925, "From Admiral 'D' Channel Fleet, Nos. 635-End, 1907, no. 656; *FDSF v.1.*, pp. 91-104; Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 360-66, 370-74; "The Channel Fleet: Lord C. Beresford and Sir P. Scott reported at Variance.", *The Times*, November 11, 1907, p. 9f.

Lord Roberts, Colonel Repington, the Secretary of State for War, Richard Haldane (1905-1912), and “invasionists” in the CID placed the Admiralty's policies under further adverse scrutiny.⁵ Against this backdrop, the Scandinavian neutrality issue re-emerged to again define the direction of the Admiralty's strategic planning.

II.

The inter-relationship between the Admiralty's strategic aims and Foreign Office diplomacy over the ongoing Baltic *status quo* question continued in early 1908. Although Norwegian independence and integrity were settled in November 1907, fallout from the neutrality debates engendered mistrust amongst the northern European powers. The Foreign Office adhered to the preservation of the *status quo* in the Baltic established by Anglo-French-Russian Conventions in the Treaty of Paris negotiated at the end of the Crimean War in 1856.⁶ Tensions in the region had re-escalated in June 1907 when Russia announced its intention to abrogate the 1856 Treaty to re-fortify the Åland Islands. This threatened Sweden's sovereignty and implied a closer German-Swedish relationship.⁷

The August meeting of the German and Russian emperors at Swinemünde, coupled with rumours of a secret Russo-German agreement to exclude non-Baltic nations from the region during a conflict, heightened British anxieties over the position of the Baltic entrances. In mid-November, Sir Edward Grey reaffirmed that given the Swinemünde developments, the key British policy issue was the effect a Russo-German

⁵ The minutes of the sixteen meetings of the CID “Invasion” sub-committee are contained in CAB 16/3A. Appendices to inquiry are in CAB 16/3B. Also see: d'Ombrain, *War Machinery*, pp. 74-92, 154-9, 164-71, 175, 179-80, 184-6, 190-2, 206-14, 218-225; Williamson, *Grand Strategy*, pp. 89-109; R. Williams, *Defending the Empire: The Conservative Party and British Defence Policy, 1899-1915*, (New Haven, 1991), pp. 130-7, 143-51; Semmel, *Liberalism*, pp. 80, 85-95, 101-06, 137-42; *FDSF v.1*, pp. 345-51; Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 378, 381-3, 384-6, 392-4, 396-7; Schurman, *Corbett*, pp. 79-98.

⁶ See Chapter 3 above; Sweet, “The Baltic”, pp. 457-64; Bond, “British War Planning”, pp. 107-09.

⁷ Chapter 3 above, footnotes 89-91.

rapprochement might have on the Baltic naval situation.⁸ Throughout December 1907-January 1908, the Russians and Germans attempted to assuage British concerns by reaffirming their commitment to a Baltic *status quo* agreement. Germany proposed a similar compact for the North Sea which included Britain, Germany, Denmark and Holland as signatories. Grey expressed no opposition to either agreement provided that France was included in any North Sea arrangement.⁹ As Russo-Swedish negotiations over the Ålands and a potential North Sea accord continued into January 1908, the Royal Navy's strategic aims were again the primary determinant of Britain's Scandinavian policy.

With the possibility of two separate agreements, the inclusion of the Belts/Sound in either was considered vital. The Admiralty's viewpoint on the proposed accords originated with the former President of the War College, Captain Edmond Slade, who replaced Ottley as DNI in August 1907. He confirmed that combined North Sea/Baltic agreements might ensure that the straits were included. It was, however, essential that the English Channel be omitted entirely. If Germany refused to accept the Baltic approaches unless the Channel was also included, Slade believed two agreements was the desirable option. He stressed that the agreement be to "respect" rather than "maintain" the *status quo*. Britain could then take "quick and effective measures" to protect its interests without direct interference from other powers.¹⁰ When the Germans clarified the inclusion of the Channel in a single arrangement if the British persisted with the Baltic entrances, Grey and the Admiralty opted for two separate accords.¹¹ Providing the Foreign Office with the "script" for the Baltic/North Sea negotiations, the

⁸ Gooch and Temperley, *BDVIII: Arbitration, Neutrality, and Security*, (London: HMSO, 1932), Nos. 106-112. Grey's November 19th letter to Tweedmouth is 112. Sweet, "The Baltic", pp. 465-8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 468-73; *BDVIII*, Nos. 113, 118, 120, 125, 129, 136.

¹⁰ Slade to Lord Tweedmouth, January 16, 1908, Slade MSS, MRF/39/1, NMM, and Slade's Diary entry for January 16th, 1908, MRF/39/3.

¹¹ Sweet, "The Baltic", p. 474; Sir Edward Grey to Sir F. Lascelles (British Ambassador at Berlin), January 24, 1908, *BDVIII*, No. 140, p. 160.

Admiralty began to re-investigate the Baltic access question should diplomatic initiatives prove unsuccessful.

Concurrent with a renewal of the Baltic issue, Fisher created another planning apparatus to succeed the Ballard Committee in early 1908. This new body, the Strategy Committee, emulated its predecessor as a “pseudo” staff through its ambiguous links to the War College and the NID. Comprising a select group under the First Sea Lord’s presidency, its membership included: Slade; the War College President, Captain Robert S. Lowry; the War Division ADNI, Captain Osmond de Brock; Fisher’s Naval Assistant, Commander Herbert Richmond; and any other officers asked by the Service chief on an *ad hoc* basis. Meeting several times a month, the Committee formulated and discussed operational plans. As an informal “think tank” under Fisher’s control, however, it was impossible for the members to know the full range of the Board’s policy on any given topic such as fleet dispositions.¹² Unlike the Ballard Committee, this group was not a NID/War College amalgamation. There was no balance between the two agencies as planning became the War College’s preserve with the NID merely providing information and advice when required.¹³ The inclusion of Slade and Lowry as the principal members of the Committee meant that planning was influenced by the College and not the NID—a complete reversal of the Ballard Committee’s procedures.¹⁴ The Strategy Committee’s nebulous structure meant that operational planning was influenced by Fisher’s whims and the experience (or lack thereof) of the War College planners. The move to a proper staff system was thus suspended by Fisher’s desire to

¹² “Appendices to Proceedings of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence appointed to inquire into certain questions of Naval Policy raised by Lord Charles Beresford.”, August 12, 1909, CAB 16/9B, Appendix 36, “Letter from Rear-Admiral E.J.W. Slade to H.H. Asquith.”, May 8, 1909, pp. 194-5; Slade Diary, January 17, 1908, Slade MSS, MRF/39/3, NMM; Mackay, *Fisher*, p. 396.

¹³ Slade to Corbett, January 3, 1908, Corbett MSS, MS 81/143, Box 6, NMM.

¹⁴ Slade Diary, January 4, 1908, Slade MSS, MRF/39/3, NMM.

keep strategic policy isolated from Beresford and his other Service opponents.¹⁵

In December 1907-January 1908, Fisher approached the Foreign Office about a formal offer to assist Sweden in deepening the Sound's Flint Channel. Slade had recommended a similar proposal in November 1907 which stressed the potential gains of a Baltic offensive.¹⁶ The advantages were: free access into the Baltic, easy passage for British dreadnoughts and older battleships through the Sound, and preventing Sweden from becoming a German satellite. The Foreign Office, however, deemed the proposal inopportune due to Swedish susceptibilities over the Åland Islands issue.¹⁷ Even as the Strategy Committee reconsidered Baltic schemes in February-March, the CID Invasion Inquiry debates revived amphibious proposals for Danish operations and inter-service cooperation.

The link between Invasion and combined operations was influenced by Julian Corbett's re-employment at the Admiralty. Brought in by Fisher to work with Slade, Corbett prepared historical precedents to shore up the Navy's case against the "invasionists" in the CID. Coinciding with this work, Corbett was completing his *England and the Seven Years War*, the main theme being a study of successful amphibious operations (i.e. Wolfe at Quebec in 1759). His and Slade's work on the Invasion Inquiry reanimated Fisher's interest in the potential of amphibious descents, though he still opposed an independent role for the Army in national strategy.¹⁸ At a 1st February Strategy Committee meeting, Fisher: "agreed that the best form of defence would be to send an army to sea [as] it would paralyse all German initiative and would

¹⁵ Slade Diary, January 6-8, 18, April 11, May 6, 20, July 11, 13, 1908, *Ibid*; Fisher to Sir Edward Grey and Fisher to Lord Tweedmouth, January 23, 1908, *FGDN* v.2, pp. 155-9; Schurman, *Corbett*, pp. 73-8; d'Ombrain, *War Machinery*, pp. 157-60.

¹⁶ Chapter 3 above; "British Policy in the Event of War with Germany", November 25, 1907, HD3/133, Permanent Under-Secretary's Department: Correspondence and Papers (Intelligence Service); Salmon, pp. 89-90.

¹⁷ Slade Diary, January 1, 1908, MRF/39/3, NMM; Sweet, pp. 477-8.

¹⁸ Schurman, *Corbett*, pp. 60-3, 73-5, 82-98; J. S. Corbett, *England in the Seven Years War: A Study in Combined Strategy, 2 Volumes*, (London, 1907); Slade to Corbett, November 18, 27, December 6-7, 1907 and January 3, 1908, Corbett MSS, MS 81/143, Box 6, NMM.

tie a large portion of their forces to the sea coast.” Through military contacts during the CID invasion debates, Slade collaborated with the DMO, Major-General John Spencer Ewart, on the possibility of a joint Danish expedition.¹⁹ The invasion sub-committee gave the Admiralty a forum to convince the Army of the necessity for a sea-borne military force. During the CID’s 20th February meeting, Slade asserted that the “threat” posed by an amphibious force of 60,000 troops would be enough to discourage a German invasion of England. Maintaining that the Army was the Navy’s “projectile”, Fisher quarrelled with the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), General (later Field-Marshal) Sir William Nicholson over the implementation of an independent military policy. The meeting, however, ended on an amicable note, with Slade convinced that the Army had come around to the Admiralty’s viewpoint.²⁰ The Strategy Committee soon consulted the War Office over an expedition to Denmark and got the proposal “crystallised out”. The soldiers agreed to prepare schemes for attacking and holding Zealand and the Nyborg-Sprongö-Korsör line in the Great Belt-- amphibious designs considered since 1904, outlined in the 1907 War Plans, and inspired by Fisher’s conviction that the Baltic was the critical theatre in an Anglo-German conflict.²¹ In late February, uncertainty generated by the proposed *status quo* agreements and hints that Germany wanted the Channel/Straits of Dover in the North Sea arrangement prompted the Strategy Committee to re-approve the 1904-07 proposals to block the Elbe.²² Should the Foreign Office’s diplomacy prove unsuccessful, the Admiralty resurrected its chief offensive options to secure the Baltic entrances for operations against Germany.

By late February-early March, progress in the North Sea/Baltic *status quo* negotiations had brought the agreements closer to culmination. Germany assured Grey that the Baltic entrances would be included in one of the two agreements. In early

¹⁹ Slade Diary, February 18, 1908, MRF/39/3, NMM; Sweet, pp. 477-8.

²⁰ Slade Diary, February 20, 1908, MRF/39/3; Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 396-7.

²¹ Slade Diary, March 4, 1908, MRF/39/3.

²² *Ibid.*, February 22, 1908; Sweet, pp. 474-5.

March, Grey brought Sweden into the Åland Islands arrangement and persuaded the Russians to drop their position and preserve the existing *status quo*. With the Åland issue resolved both agreements were signed on 23rd April 1908.²³ These positive developments, however, had little effect on Fisher's attitude and official Admiralty policy. After the Åland settlement, he wrote to Edward VII that a more decisive guarantee was needed to secure the Navy's strategic access into the Baltic.

I told Hardinge [Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs]....that we were making a hideous mistake in our half-measures, which please no one and perpetuate the fable of 'perfidious Albion', and that we ought to have thrown in our lot with Russia completely and let her fortify the Åland Islands as against Sweden and Germany. For a naval war (as against Germany) we want Russia with us, and we want the Åland Islands fortified. Germany has got Sweden in her pocket now, and they will divide Denmark between them in case of war as against Russia and England, (and unless our offensive is quick) close the Baltic as effectually as the Sultan locks up the Black Sea with the possession of the Dardanelles.²⁴

Fisher noted that this epistle "followed on" a previous talk where he had reiterated his 1904-05 contention that the Navy should "Copenhagen *a la* Nelson the German Fleet at Kiel."²⁵ His correspondence revealed the direction of the Strategy Committee's new operational studies and the motivations behind them. He did not believe that the *status quo* agreements ensured the Navy's passage into the Baltic in a conflict with Germany.

Slade, too, bombarded Tweedmouth with appreciations on the Baltic entrances and arguments that more decisive steps were warranted in an Anglo-German war. In March, he remarked that although the Germans would mine the Great Belt and maintain batteries to prevent the passage being swept, British naval/amphibious operations could go ahead, "....and probably it would be found that with proper preparation by the Navy these Channels would in the end be quite as suitable for landing operations as the N. and

²³ *BDVIII*, Nos. 141-9, 152-3. The text of the Baltic and North Sea Agreements are Nos. 152-3; Sweet, pp. 475-7.

²⁴ Fisher to King Edward VII, March 24, 1908, *FGDN* v.2, p. 169.

²⁵ Fisher, *Memories*, pp. 3-5.

N.E. sides of Zealand.”²⁶ In November 1907, Slade had argued for an offensive Baltic push “as soon as possible”, at the outset of any war with Germany. Securing the Belts, such an attack would quickly bring Germany to terms and would halt German sea-borne commerce. A naval presence in the Baltic would eliminate its use as a “safe refuge” for Germany’s fleet and a staging area for expeditions against Britain. The DNI promoted Fisher’s proposal to deepen the Sound even if it meant playing the Swedes off against the Danes who were less inclined to accept such an undertaking. The Admiralty conclusions were:

1. That we ought not to abandon the Baltic. Whatever we may find it necessary to do in war as a temporary measure, it must never be admitted by actual word or inference, that we do not intend to defend our interest in those waters.
2. That both Denmark and Sweden should understand that we do not intend to allow the entrances to that sea to be shut in our faces.
3. That in order to ensure that we shall not be excluded from the Baltic, we must be prepared at any time after war has broken out to undertake a large combined expedition against Denmark.
4. That the passage through the Sound is the best passage into the Baltic if it is deepened, and it will be to our advantage to push the work on if possible.
5. That we should endeavour to convince both Russia and Sweden that it will so be greatly to their advantage if this passage is made....²⁷

A belief that Foreign Office diplomacy in the Baltic/North Sea negotiations had not guaranteed the Navy’s access to the Baltic led Fisher and Slade to pursue an independent policy. By late March, the Strategy Committee was constructing contingencies for the seizure of the Danish Islands.²⁸ In April, Fisher circumvented diplomatic channels and approached Count Wrangel, the Swedish Minister in London, over the deepening of the Flint Channel. It was analogous to his April 1907 conversation with the Norwegian Minister, Fridtjof Nansen, over a possible British

²⁶ “D.N.I.’s remarks on the Considerations affecting the Operations of a British Force in Zealand.”, March 1908, Slade MSS, MRF/39/3.

²⁷ “Memorandum by DNI to Lord Tweedmouth on Baltic Operations”, November 25, 1907, *Ibid.*

²⁸ Slade Diary, March 28, 29, 30, and April 25, 1908, MRF/39/3.

violation of Norway's neutrality. Grey repudiated Fisher's overture as the Foreign Office remained convinced that the *status quo* agreements had finally settled the Baltic issue.²⁹ For Fisher, the Admiralty would have to re-examine and re-draft its strategic options surrounding the Baltic entrances to secure what diplomacy had failed to accomplish.

III.

The 1908 "W" series war plans originated in strategic concerns over the Baltic entrances following the Baltic/North Sea agreements. Stimulated by studies begun during the *status quo* negotiations in January-March 1908, they were only marginally distinct from the Ballard Committee's work. This was primarily due to the Strategy Committee's status and composition. Linked exclusively to the War College and Fisher, it was bereft of the experience that former NID planners such as Ballard and Hankey had brought to the planning process. As such, the contingencies it produced largely imitated the inshore and amphibious operations again contemplated.

The six "W" series plans, W.1.-W.6., all examined a potential Anglo-German conflict but varied in their assessments over the involvement of other powers. War Plans W.1. and W.2. dealt with an Anglo-German war, while W.3. assumed Britain would support France. The remaining plans explored the unrealistic scenario that Britain would face a German-American compact.³⁰ The directive to begin the plans came from Fisher in late May with the first drafts to be completed in June. Proposals were passed from Fisher to Slade and the ADNI's, who then disseminated them to Lowry and the War College where the actual work was carried out.³¹ Corbett unofficially contributed through his work on the Invasion Inquiry, but to a lesser extent than he had on the

²⁹ See: Chapter 3 above; Salmon, pp. 72-3; Sweet, pp. 477-8; "Minute by Sir Edward Grey commenting on memorandum by Mr. G. H. Villiers on the 'Passages into the Baltic Sea', May 7, 1908, *BDVIII*, No. 155., p. 182. Grey refers to Fisher's approach to Wrangel as coming "from a certain quarter here."

³⁰ "War Plans Germany, W.1.-W.6.", ADM 116/1034B, Part. 1.

³¹ Slade Diary, May 26, 30, and June 1, 1908, MRF/39/3, NMM.

Ballard Committee.³²

“War Plan Germany, W.1.” (June 1908), explored a German offensive strategy anticipated to reduce British naval forces by enticing them to attack the German North Sea coast---an operational plan studied and adopted by the German Admiralty Staff. The 1906 German Manoeuvres simulated a British offensive against their North Sea coastline and amphibious/naval attacks on Kiel and the Canal; a fact known to the NID and Admiralty.³³ The difference between W.1. and earlier plans was that it entailed a defensive strategy over thrusts against the North Sea and Baltic coasts. At the outbreak of war, British fleets would avoid the German coast and hostile torpedo-craft. W.1. cautioned that British units should avoid entering the Baltic if German naval forces controlled the Belts. The “North Sea Battle Fleet” would retire at night, “beyond the utmost limits which hostile destroyers could reach from their own ports.”, (i.e. 170 miles from the German coast). The object was, “that a force in the Heligoland Bight will be able to cut off any small force which may leave the Elbe or the Jade, or give notice of any movement of the main German Fleet.” The plan postulated an “observational” blockade employing a division of six destroyers and a *Scout* off each estuary, with the cruiser returning to within 30 miles to support the destroyers at daybreak. Beyond the small cruisers on station, and out of German flotilla range, an armoured cruiser squadron would patrol as a covering force.³⁴

W.1. comprised the new War Orders to the C-in-C Channel, which reminded Beresford that war planning, fleet dispositions, and strategic policy were exclusively under the Admiralty’s control. These orders followed Beresford’s 5th June letter to the new First Lord, Reginald McKenna (1908-1911), which outlined his chief objections

³² *Ibid.*, June 15, 1908.

³³ Lambi, pp. 333-8; “Foreign Naval Progress and Estimates, September 1907. Germany Manoeuvres, Exercises, &c., 1906.”, pp. 49-82, NID Report No. 834, ADM 231/48.

³⁴ “War Plan Germany W.1.”, June 1908, pp. 350-402, 403-43, ADM 116/1034B, Part 1.

to Admiralty policy.³⁵ The July War Orders summarised aspects of W.1. and the restrictions placed on Beresford's command by the Admiralty.

1. The principal object is to bring the main German fleet to decisive action and all other operations are subsidiary to this end.
2. The Commander-in-Chief will direct the movements of the 1st Cruiser Squadron and Destroyer Flotillas off the German coast.
3. He is to establish a cordon of cruisers from the Skaw to Norway.
4. He is to stop the German trade in the North Sea.
5. He is not to enter the Baltic without orders.
6. He is not to pass the Straits of Dover except to follow the main German Fleet.
7. He is to prevent any raiding expeditions leaving the German ports.³⁶

Plan W.1. incorporated Plan B-D's close North Sea blockade scenario, even though it advocated a more distant "observational" operation. Provisoes to seize one of the Frisian Islands as an advanced base were included in the Admiralty's communications to Beresford. The Board: "attach[ed] great value to the establishment of an advanced base for the torpedo craft; but the utmost secrecy being necessary for the successful carrying out of the project, its details are reserved for a special communication as stated in the print herewith."-- an allusion to Plans B-C and proposals considered since the 1890's.³⁷

Conversely, W.1.'s prescriptions to keep the fleet away from German torpedo-craft was akin to Wilson's "Remarks" and Corbett's "Introduction" to the 1907 War Plans, which deprecated a close blockade strategy due to the losses that German flotillas would inflict on even a portion of the British Fleet. W.1., in fact, imitated Wilson's proposals that a close watch on the German rivers and the Skagerrak/Kattegat be

³⁵ "Appendices to Proceedings of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence to Inquire into Certain Questions of Naval Policy Raised by Lord Charles Beresford. 1909", 2 Whitehall Gardens, August 12, 1909, CAB 19/9B; Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 400-01. Beresford's charges included: fleet allocations in home waters, the Home Fleet's constitution, no campaign plan, a shortage of small cruisers and destroyers, and lack of a properly defended East Coast base.

³⁶ "War Orders to C-in-C Channel", July 1, 1908, ADM 116/1034B, Part 1; Admiralty, C.I. Thomas [Civil Lord] to C-in-C Channel Fleet, "War Orders", July 1, 1908, ADM 116/1037, Case 1697.

³⁷ "Secret. Extracts from Official Correspondence, &c between the Admiralty and Lord C. Beresford, April 1907 to January 1908, War Orders, June 1908.", ADM 116/3108, Case 0086.

maintained to watch for High Seas Fleet sorties.³⁸ War Plan W.1. attempted to provide a viable alternative to the dangers associated with a close blockade like 1907's Plan A/A1 (distant blockade). It did not, however, exclude inshore operations as it contained the "close watch" on the North Sea rivers and the establishment of an advanced base to support these operations. A German fleet sortie against light forces watching the North Sea coastline could have drawn the British fleet into the very waters that W.1.'s central premise intended to avoid. The inexperienced War College planners attempted to find an intermediate ground between the conflicting realities of a close watch on the German seaboard and the dangers revealed by Wilson's sober 1907 "Remarks".

Plan W.2. (June 1908) was synchronised with the "observational" blockade and resurrected advanced flotilla base schemes near the German coast. The proposal for a *coup de main* on Borkum was ruled out due to increased fortification on the island but retained as a possible option. Other islands would instead be seized by an expedition of Royal Marines. Wangeroog and Sylt were potential forward bases, especially Sylt as it was already a German torpedo-boat station, possessed the proper facilities, and doubled as a coaling base for squadrons off the German North Sea coast and those watching the Skagerrak/Kattegat. The drawback was that the islands were defended, Sylt heavily. Another proposal included creating an "extempore" breakwater from hulks on the Horn's Reef where destroyers could coal and be serviced by a depot ship. The Home Fleet would be based at Rosyth with the Channel Fleet operating from Portland, midway up the English Channel.³⁹

Apart from the Horn's Reef "breakwater" scheme, W.2. lacked originality. The advanced North Sea base concept originated in the NID's July 1904 plan, if not earlier in Ballard's 1897 RUSI essay, the 1905 Ottley-Wilson recommendations, and the

³⁸ 1907 Admiralty War Plans for War With Germany, Part 1, "Some Principles of Naval Warfare." [Corbett], and "Remarks on the War Plans.", [Wilson], May 1907, ADM 116/1034B, Part 1; Kemp, *Fisher Papers* v.2, pp. 330-1, 334-6, 454-9.

³⁹ "War Plan. Germany W.2.", June 1908, pp. 444-508, ADM 116/1043B, Part 1.

Ballard Committee studies.⁴⁰ W.2.'s amphibious proposals duplicated Slade's "Preamble" and, specifically, Plans B/B1-C/C1 which contained Hankey's original 1904 "Advanced Bases for the Fleet". The use of Borkum, Sylt, and Wangeroog as advanced bases was projected in Plans B-D and Wilson's "Remarks".⁴¹ W.2. mirrored W.1.'s premise that British heavy vessels should stay out of the North Sea. Its proposal to use Rosyth and Portland as bases repeated Wilson's recommendations that two strong fleets should be based on northern and southern English ports. North Sea "sweeps" by either fleet would, it was hoped, cut the High Seas Fleet off from its ports. Wilson thought that destroyers alone needed to be in the North Sea.⁴² Lord Esher intimated that this was the prevailing Admiralty conviction in August 1908.

I saw Francis [Knollys, Edward VII's Private Secretary]....and a good deal of Jackie [Fisher]. We had one very long talk about Naval strategy and all his worries. J. told me of Arthur Wilson's determination, in the event of war with Germany, *not* to locate his battle-fleet in the North Sea. The rendezvous would be in the Orkneys, and there the fleet would lie, ready for battle. Only Cruisers and Destroyers in the North Sea.⁴³

Fisher's support for the more cautious North Sea operations advocated by Wilson and the Strategy Committee was implied. It supports recent contentions that Fisher was, at the time, initiating a protective North Sea strategy to safeguard Britain's East Coast.

Throughout 1905-1909, Fisher apparently adopted a "flotilla defence" strategy that would keep heavier units out of the North Sea while coastal destroyers, torpedo-boats, and submarines defended Britain against German invasion. This purported strategy was an economical response to rising British naval expenditure. It conforms to the equally controversial belief that fiscal restraint and an inclination for speed and

⁴⁰ Refer to Chapters 2 and 3 above; *Anatomy*, pp. 502-07; Captain G.A. Ballard, "Remarks....", May 3, 1909, ADM 1/8997.

⁴¹ See Chapter 3 above; 1907 Admiralty War Plans and Remarks on the War Plans by Sir A.K. Wilson, May 1907, ADM 116/1043B, Part 1; Kemp (ed), *Fisher Papers* v.2, pp 395-454.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 458-9.

⁴³ Brett and Esher Oliver, *Esher, Volume 2*, Journal entry, August 21, 1908.

heavy armament drove Fisher to favour a battle cruiser fleet over dreadnought battleships. "Flotilla defence" complemented the battle cruiser concept by avoiding a major North Sea fleet action and allowed the Admiralty to employ battle cruisers in defence of imperial trade routes. This supposition and analysis of Admiralty war planning is, however, cursory at best. It regurgitates earlier arguments that war plans were merely a foil to Fisher's critics without evaluating: the contents of the 1907-08 plans, their relation to the Baltic balance of power/straits issue, nor if Fisher desired a "flotilla defence" why was the emphasis of 1904-08 planning orientated towards offensive operations?⁴⁴

The third plan, W.3., followed the Baltic/North Sea agreements, but was influenced by the beginning of the Casablanca Crisis in late September 1908. With this crisis following Austria's annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Grey warned the Admiralty that preparations were needed in case Britain had to support France in response to a German ultimatum.⁴⁵ W.3. assumed that Britain would back France and preserve the European balance of power. While Part 1 of W.3. (September) was an immediate response to the Casablanca crisis, Part 2 (August) originated in the Strategy Committee's work during the Baltic/North Sea negotiations, W.1.'s Baltic/North Sea operations, the 1907 War Plans, and earlier planning from 1904-05.⁴⁶ W.3. Part 1. envisioned the transport of a British expeditionary army (BEF) of 70,000 across to Dunkirk to aid the French in battles along the Franco-German frontier. The antithesis

⁴⁴ N. Lambert's contentious, *Fisher's Naval Revolution* encapsulates the author's 1992 Oxford DPhil dissertation, "The Influence of the Submarine Upon Naval History, 1898-1918." and related articles. See: "Admiral Sir John Fisher and the Concept of Flotilla Defence, 1904-1909.", *The Journal of Military History*, 59 (October 1995), pp. 639-60. Sumida's, *In Defence*, outlines his belief that the battle cruiser, mated with a superior fire control system, was the intended pinnacle of Fisher's reform policy—an argument widely accepted by most historians of the Edwardian Navy.

⁴⁵ The Casablanca Crisis began on September 25, 1908, when the German consul in Morocco attempted to conceal three deserters from the French Foreign Legion. It led to naval consultations with the French, suspended since 1905-06. See: Williamson, *Grand Strategy*, pp.132-3, 243-6; *FDSF* v.1, pp. 140-50; Grey to McKenna, November 5, 1908, No. 132, *BDVII*, and Nos. 119-44; Fisher to Viscount Knollys, December 22, 1908 in *FGDN* v.2, pp. 204-05.

⁴⁶ "War Plan W.3. England and France v. Germany.", Part 1, p. 28, September 1908, and Part2, p. 19, August 1908, ADM 116/1043B, Part 1.

of Fisher's opposition to the "continental" strategy and his refusal to safeguard "the Ferry" in 1906, this aspect was likely due to Slade's contacts with the War Office.⁴⁷ After the acceleration of the Bosnian Crisis in mid-November, the War College planners re-examined operations along the German North Sea littoral, in Denmark, and the blocking of the Elbe.⁴⁸

War Plan W.3., Part 1. maintained that the North Sea remained the Navy's principal theatre with the High Seas Fleet's destruction the main goal. It repeated Plan A/A1, Wilson's recommendations, and W.1., in denying Germany's North Sea access while goading the German fleet into a decisive action. Like the 1907 plans, Part 1. forecast active naval cooperation with France. With the Royal Navy concentrated in the North Sea, the French would hold the English Channel from Ushant to Land's End. French squadrons would institute an upper Channel cordon, supported by torpedo-boats at Dunkirk, Calais, and Dover. French Mediterranean forces would guard against Austrian and Italian intervention and facilitate the release of the British Mediterranean Fleet to home waters.⁴⁹ Given Fisher's attitude to French involvement, however, these provisions only became a reality after 1912 due to pressures created by the Anglo-German naval rivalry.⁵⁰

Despite views from Wilson, Corbett, and others that close blockade was obsolete, W.3., Part 1. retained this scheme. Whereas Plan W.1. had supplanted the close blockade with an "observation" of the German littoral, Part 1. was a melange comprising Plan A's distant blockade, W.1.'s "watch" on the German coast, and post-

⁴⁷ "War Plan W.3....Part 1.", pp. 481-554, ADM 116/1043B, Part 1; Williamson, pp. 77-9; Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 350-6, 405-6.

⁴⁸ Slade Diary, October 8, November 10, 19, 1908, MRF/39/3.

⁴⁹ "War Plan W.3....Part 1, pp. 481-554, ADM 116/1043B.

⁵⁰ The Anglo-French Naval Agreements in 1912 and 1914 were influenced by: the Agadir Crisis, July 1911; Anglo-German naval conversations and the Haldane Mission to Berlin, February 1912; Parliamentary debates over the 1912-13 Naval Estimates; Churchill's proposal to abandon the Mediterranean and the Grey-Cambon letters of November 1912. The best interpretation remains: Williamson, *Grand Strategy*, pp. 284-99, 318-27.

1904 North Sea amphibious/inshore operations. Proposed scenarios included: observational squadrons of cruisers, destroyers, and submarines off the German rivers; the Channel Fleet /First Cruiser Squadron's observation of the Skagerrak; a Royal Marine expedition to Borkum supported by the Home Fleet; a Heligoland bombardment by the battle fleets and Fifth Cruiser Squadron with the Borkum operation; a cruiser cordon between the Terschelling and Horn's Reef Light Vessels; a patrol line from the Shetlands to Norway; destroyer patrols off the North Frisian Islands; and the old plans to block the Elbe and Weser. To prevent German attacks against the BEF's transport to France, British cruisers and destroyers would effectively "block-in" the Heligoland Bight through an observational blockade of Germany's North Sea ports.⁵¹

W.3., Part 1., attempted to balance competing options which were all equally complex, contradictory, and hazardous. A close blockade of the German coast coupled with observational lines off the Heligoland Bight and German rivers dissipated strength, exposing the British cordons to an attack in force. If fleet units converged to support lighter forces, they would invariably be drawn into waters occupied by German torpedo-craft and submarines-- the scenario Plan W.1., Plan A/A1, and Wilson had all sought to avoid.

By February 1905, the German Admiralty Staff had already considered that the British might advance on the Elbe and seize Borkum, Heligoland, and Sylt as advanced bases. In 1906, Germany strengthened its defences in the Frisian Islands, Cuxhaven, and Heligoland to prevent a surprise attack on the Elbe and the Canal's western entrance. The German Admiralty Staff's decision to strengthen their North Sea littoral defences was influenced by the outcomes of their 1904 and 1906 manoeuvres. In both exercises, *Yellow Fleet*, (British), had varying success in attacks around Heligoland and thrusts against the Elbe, Weser, and Ems. The manoeuvres simulated a British push past Cuxhaven to destroy the German fleet and block the western end of the Canal. These facts were not explored in W.3., Part 1. despite detailed NID reports on the manoeuvres

⁵¹ "War Plan W.3....Part 1.", ADM 116/1043B, pp. 481-554.

and upgraded German North Sea defences.⁵² With planning reorientated to the War College, the degree to which Lowry's staff consulted the NID reports is questionable.

Internal contradictions from earlier plans were repeated in the "W" series. A close blockade on Germany's North Sea littoral, with observational squadrons or cordons outside the Bight, ignored the complexities attending such operations. Beyond Borkum's value as a forward base, no provisions were made for the logistical/communications difficulties inherent in maintaining simultaneous blockade lines at considerable distance from East Coast bases. Borkum was 240 miles from Harwich, the nearest British port.⁵³ Although the cordon system "leaves much to be desired in many respects", the Strategy Committee instead focussed on preventing the passage of neutral trade from North Sea ports.⁵⁴ Unlike the Borkum, Heligoland, and the Elbe proposals, they were aware of the dangers facing a North Sea close blockade but less certain of its success.

Promoting the close blockade in Part 1., the Committee doubted its effectiveness: "The remarks on this project must, however, be prefaced by stating frankly that it is fraught with greater possibilities of danger to the blockading squadrons than the system cordons across the Straits of Dover and across the northern entrance to the North Sea."⁵⁵ Either Plan A/A1's distant blockade or W.1.'s "observational" blockade were preferred to a close blockade. These internal contradictions and omissions reflected the Strategy Committee's *ad hoc* status, the NID's separation from the planning process, and the planners' inexperience--symptoms of Fisher's agenda to

⁵² "Foreign Naval Manoeuvres, 1904. Germany", NID Report No. 758, March 1905, pp. 5-19, ADM 231/43; "Germany. Coast Defences, Resources, &c., including Coast Defence, Ordnance, Mines &c., 1906.", NID Report No. 812, January 1907, 257 pp, ADM 231/47; "Germany. Manoeuvres, Exercises, &c., 1906.", NID Report No. 834, September 1907, pp. 66-74, ADM 231/48; Lambi, pp. 255-6, 277-8, 332-8; P. Kennedy, "German Naval Plans Against England, 1896-1914." in *The War Plans of the Great Powers*, pp. 181-4; Hayes, pp. 102-3, 115-16.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.110.

⁵⁴ "War Plan W.3....Part 2.", p. 503, ADM 116/1043B, Part 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

preserve his strategic policy from internal attack.

War Plan W.3. Part 2. (August 1908) was predicated on 1904-07 Baltic proposals re-examined during the Baltic/North Sea *status quo* arbitrations. Postulating that France would face a German invasion alone, Part 2. recommended three cases where British troops could be employed in the North Sea/Baltic to relieve pressure on the French frontier armies. Case 1 suggested a Heligoland Bight blockade and patrol of the northern North Sea exit should Denmark side with Germany. The North Frisian islands of Sylt, Röm, Föhr, Amrum, Langness, and Oland would be seized by British troops on the outbreak of war. Case 1 also advocated a Baltic landing on the Eiderstedt Peninsula to threaten the Kiel Canal--the source of Fisher's ongoing fascination with Schleswig-Holstein. Other aspects of W.3. reflected his Baltic/"Copenhagen" themes and the Army's employment as the Navy's "projectile".

Cases 2 and 3 prescribed responses to a German invasion of Denmark. The Navy would force the Great Belt and block the Little Belt's northern entrance. Amphibious landings could then seize Fehmarn, Sylt, and Röm Islands to establish bases against Kiel and secure the Lister Deep anchorage. Simultaneous landings would be made on the Eiderstedt and the peninsula between the Bay of Eckernförde and the Scheiford. British fleets would check German naval forces to protect the landings and also conduct a blockade on Danzig, Swinemünde, Travemünde, and Memel. The last three ports and the Elbe would be blocked with sunken hulks as a final measure.⁵⁶ In form, content, and objectives, W.3. Case 2 copied contingencies first outlined in 1904-05, "fleshed out" by War Plans B-D,⁵⁷ and the Strategy Committee's January-March efforts to guarantee access through the Belts.

Discrepancies from the Ballard Committee plans were repeated in W.3., including ignoring: the strong defences at Kiel and other Baltic ports; an extensive German rail network which facilitated rapid military deployment; the logistical

⁵⁶ "War Plan W.3....Part 2., pp. 559-67, ADM 116/1043B, Part 1.

⁵⁷ For the similarities between W.3.'s proposals and 1907 Plans B-D, refer to Chapter 3 above and Kemp, *Fisher Papers v.2.*, pp. 395-445.

difficulties attending any Baltic operations; and the presence of German mines, torpedo-craft, and submarines in these confined waters.⁵⁸ Another oversight assumed the Army's cooperation in the Baltic designs. Whereas W.3. Part 1. tacitly accepted the "continental" strategy *vis-a-vis* the BEF's transport to France, Part 2. espoused that the Army act as the Navy's "projectile". The Strategy Committee and Slade incorrectly expected the military's support for these adventures despite Fisher's opposition to the "continental" strategy, the DMO/General Staff's rejection of earlier amphibious proposals, and inter-service conflict during the Invasion Inquiry.⁵⁹

Proof that the "W" series emulated earlier contingencies existed in attached studies. Pertaining to W.1.-W.3. were the following: "Detailed Plan for the Seizure of the Island of Sylt.", "Detailed Scheme for Blocking the Weser River.", and "Detailed Scheme for Blocking the Mouth of the Elbe.". While more refined, these schemes regurgitated 1904-07 proposals such the seizure of Sylt and the blocking of the Weser and Elbe with sunken hulks.⁶⁰ Other studies complemented W.3.'s scenario of a possible German invasion of Denmark. Entitled, "Military Expedition to Zealand in Support of the Danes Against German Invasion.", these provisoes detailed a combined expedition to prevent German control over the Belts and the Sound.⁶¹ As such, they elaborated on scenarios outlined in: Plan D, Slade's liaison with the DMO during the Invasion Inquiry, the Strategy Committee's December 1907-March 1908 studies, and Fisher's ongoing concern over the Baltic entrances.

"Forcing the Defences at Cuxhaven." was also appended to the "W" series. It re-examined Wilson's 1906-07 proposals to force the Elbe with old *Royal Sovereign* Class

⁵⁸ Hayes, pp. 102, 108; Haggie, p. 123; *FDSF* v.1, pp. 426-7.

⁵⁹ Summerton's, "British Military Planning", especially Chapter 5 remains the most comprehensive study of the General Staff/DMO evaluations of the Admiralty's 1905-08 amphibious projects.

⁶⁰ ADM116/1043B, Part 1., pp. 698-726.

⁶¹ "Very Secret. Military Expedition to Zealand in Support of the Danes Against German Invasion.", June 6, 1908, *Ibid*, pp. 741-60, 761-89.

battle ships and minesweepers.⁶² Proceeding up the Elbe, this “River Squadron” would bombard Cuxhaven’s forts to expedite four options: an attack on the German Fleet if in the Elbe, the Kiel Canal’s destruction, troop landings to destroy the Cuxhaven fortifications, and to cover an expedition occupying the peninsula between the Elbe and Weser Rivers. Introductory comments, however, demeaned a successful run past the Cuxhaven defences.

The fact cannot, however, be disguised that the project is one which can only be regarded as justifiable in the direst extremities. It is full of dangers from the outset, and, as far as can be seen, dangers which would be productive of loss altogether incommensurate with the advantages likely to accrue.⁶³

These realistic appraisals were a *volte face* to Wilson’s “Remarks” where he accepted the operation as necessary despite the heavy loss in ships and men.⁶⁴ The planners, however, retained it as an option despite their apprehensions over the operation’s objectives. An attack on the German Fleet in the Elbe was, “a gratuitous waste of effort, wrong from any point of view”, while blocking the estuary was thought more effective than a direct attack on the Kiel Canal: “This being so, it is quite unnecessary to sacrifice ships and men in attempting to force our way past Cuxhaven.” Assaulting Cuxhaven was an “eccentric” attack, dependent on large bodies of troops which would not influence the naval situation. Favouring the less costly Elbe option, the Committee were apparently unaware that in July 1904 and May 1908, the Hydrographic Department had ruled out successful river obstructions due to the strong tides and currents in the Ems, Weser, and Elbe estuaries. Endeavours to “seal up” the western North Sea outlets were further complicated by interference from the German defences.⁶⁵

While the Cuxhaven paper was a comprehensive analysis of Wilson’s pet project

⁶² Kemp (ed), *Fisher Papers* v.2, pp. 459-61.

⁶³ “Forcing the Defences at Cuxhaven.”, October 5, 1908, ADM 116/1043B, Part 1., pp. 729-40.

⁶⁴ Kemp, *Fisher Papers* v.2, p. 459.

⁶⁵ “Blocking a Channel in a tideway”, Memorandum by F. Mostyn Field, Hydrographer, May 22, 1908, ADM 116/866B, 1889-1912 Naval Staff Memoranda, Case 4173.

and related schemes, it was not an outright condemnation. It subtly intimated that certain operations were, in fact, viable contingencies. The planners advocated obstructing the Elbe as a “less suicidal way” of removing the Canal as an interior line for the German Fleet. Sending an expeditionary force to capture the Cuxhaven Peninsula was legitimate if Britain was allied with France as it threatened the German right flank, the Canal, Schleswig-Holstein, and would tie up considerable German forces—another reiteration of earlier NID/Admiralty plans.⁶⁶ The retention of this option revealed the importance attached to these operations as vital preliminaries to any Baltic campaign by Fisher and the Admiralty.

The last plans, “War Plans W.4.-W.6., England v. Germany and the United States”, illustrated Fisher’s often unrealistic approach to war planning. A product of his increased strategic preoccupation with the United States during the second half of 1908, the plans dealt with the unlikely scenario of Britain facing a German-American alliance.⁶⁷ Fleet deployments based on a war against the U.S. and Germany were considered in July, a distribution decried by Slade as, “....the most hopelessly puerile thing that he could possibly bring out.”⁶⁸ The inclusion of the United States as a naval threat was strange, since Fisher was becoming increasingly pro-American and did not envision their hostility in an Anglo-German conflict.⁶⁹ W.4.-W.6. assumed that all other powers were neutral with the American fleet crossing the Atlantic to join with the High Seas Fleet. What would precipitate such an occurrence was not clarified. According to Slade: “Sir J.F. said that in case of war between us & Germany combined with America we should base a fleet in Lough Swilly [northern Ireland] ready to meet the Americans

⁶⁶ “Forcing the Defences at Cuxhaven.”, October 5, 1908, ADM 116/1043B, Part 1, pp. 729-31.

⁶⁷ “War Plan W.4., England v. Germany and the United States.”, December 8, 1908, ADM 116/1043B, Part 1., pp. 596-625; “War Plans W.5., W.6., England v. Germany and the United States.”, ADM 116/1043B, Part 2, (Volume 2), pp. 482-718.

⁶⁸ Slade Diary, June 22, 1908, MRF/39/3. Mackay, *Fisher*, p. 403.

⁶⁹ Offer, *The First World War*, pp. 253-5.

first if it comes over. What was going to bring it over he did not specify.”⁷⁰ Under this circumstance, Britain’s only recourse was to keep its fleets concentrated at home to engage the Americans as they came over. Canada would not be reinforced and the Mediterranean Fleet and all overseas cruiser squadrons recalled home.⁷¹ In a 16th November meeting between Fisher, McKenna and Slade to discuss the Two Power Standard, as applied to Germany and the U.S., the W.4.-W.6. provisions were scrutinised. The “prevailing idea” was that nothing could be done until the Navy was strong enough to “go off the coasts of both and defeat them.” Apparently opposed to this view, the DNI complained: “The idea of defensive war is quite unknown to them [Fisher, McKenna], and the possibility of dealing defensively with one & offensively with the other never occurred to them.”⁷² Slade’s objection underlined a viable strategic option in the quixotic W.4.-W.6. proposals. They gave the Admiralty the flexibility to calculate how much force was needed to mask the High Seas Fleet in the North Sea, leaving the remainder to meet the American fleet or break into the Baltic under the provisions outlined in Plans C-D, W.2., and W.3.

W.4.-W.6. resurrected the 1904-07 schemes repeated in War Plans W.1.-W.3. and emphasised a cruiser/destroyer “watch” on the German rivers, an observational blockade of the North Sea coast, and amphibious projects to capture Heligoland and Borkum as “flying” bases for flotilla patrols.⁷³ Like the 1907 War Plans, the “W” series contained addenda outlining the actual ships slated to participate in the projected operations. W.5. included attached orders to all Fleet and Squadron C-in-C’s on the outbreak of war. These detailed the individual ship allocations, dispositions, and duties under the operations assigned to them in the Admiralty war plans. W.5. and W.6. contained nominal ship lists, assigned to specific operations as well as their distribution,

⁷⁰ Slade Diary, November 16, 1908, MRF/39/3.

⁷¹ “War Plan W.4.”, December 8, 1908, ADM 116/1043B, Part 1., pp. 865-8; “War Plan W.5.”, Introduction, ADM 116/1043B, Part 2., pp. 486-8.

⁷² Slade Diary, November 16, 1908, MRF 39/3, Slade MSS, NMM.

⁷³ “War Plan W.4.”, pp. 870-2; “War Plan W.5.”, pp. 489-93, 589-649.

points of assembly, objectives, and deployment areas. The orders pertained to each fleet, squadron, flotilla, and the various operations they were to fulfil under the strictures of Plans W.1.-W.5..⁷⁴

When considered with the Admiralty's anxieties during the Baltic/North Sea *status quo* negotiations, the Casablanca Crisis, and Austria's annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the inclusion of detailed ship/fleet deployments suggests that aspects of the 1908 plans were, like their antecedents, viewed as viable contingencies in an Anglo-German war. This was reinforced by the elaborate reappraisals of earlier projects to seize Borkum, Sylt, and Heligoland; the 1904-05 Elbe blocking plan to neutralise the Canal's western exit; and descents in Denmark to secure the Belts. The axioms underpinning the 1908 plans were the same as their predecessors: to contain/destroy the High Seas Fleet in the Baltic or Elbe, eliminate Kiel, and carry the war directly to Germany through landings in either Schleswig-Holstein or Pomerania. The repetition and latent inconsistencies in the "W" series reflected Fisher's reorganisation of the Admiralty's planning environment, but also his view that the Baltic and North Sea littoral were the principal operational theatres for a war with Germany. The 1908 plans revived the same theme behind Admiralty planning from the 1890's onwards—an offensive against the enemy's vital strategic assets as a deterrent or, failing that, to quickly terminate a conflict.

Even as the "W" series neared completion, Fisher reiterated his view that the Army be employed as the Navy's "projectile". Writing to the Conservative MP, Edward Goulding, he voiced his opposition to Lord Robert's post-Invasion Inquiry agitations for a home defence army, adding:

We want an Army to *attack*, not one to *defend*! 'A DEFENCE' Army means the end of England! For then it's not '*invasion*'--it's '*STARVATION*'! There is only ONE defence and *only one* for our Empire! '*The command of the sea*' Don't imperil that by filching money that ought to be used for the Navy in bolstering up an Army that is sworn not to go away from their homes!.... We want a sea-

⁷⁴ "War Plan W.5.", ADM 116/1043B, Part 2, pp. 676-80, 690-701, 715-18. For similar ship lists and their roles under the 1907 Admiralty War Plans, see: Kemp, *Fisher Papers* v.2, pp. 384-93, 409-18, 438-45.

going Army that we can launch forth anywhere AT AN HOUR'S NOTICE!⁷⁵

Along with this remonstrance, Fisher remained preoccupied with access into the Baltic. On 21st December 1908, he informed McKenna that he would have to miss a meeting with the President of the Board of Trade, Winston Churchill, because, "I am engaged all the afternoon with Ottley on a strategic discussion about the Baltic and the Belts which I cannot defer;".⁷⁶ This meeting occurred immediately after the second meeting of the CID's sub-committee on the "Military Needs of the Empire", a forum where the Admiralty hesitantly revealed its plans to seize Zealand and the Belts before increased opposition from the DMO and the General Staff.⁷⁷ Although never openly endorsing his preference for Baltic contingencies and other provisions in the "W" series plans, Fisher had tacitly supported the work produced by the Strategy Committee and the Ballard Committee.

IV.

Fisher's "Commentary on the War Plans" (December 1908), was the only substantial document illustrating his views on the 1907-08 war planning.⁷⁸ His observations did not clarify or critique the deficiencies in both series but reinforced the notion that they were accepted doctrine. Fisher placed particular emphasis on Wilson's May 1907 "Remarks". He repeated the latter's concerns that at the outbreak of war, British capital ships should be kept out of the North Sea: "It would be suicidal to expose the armoured units of our Fleet to a surprise Torpedo attack by stationing them before

⁷⁵ Fisher to Edward A. Goulding, mid-November 1908, *FGDN* v.2, p. 201.

⁷⁶ Fisher to Reginald McKenna, December 21, 1908, *Ibid*, pp. 203-04.

⁷⁷ Minutes and records from the CID's Military Needs of the Empire sub-committee, December 1908 and March 1909, are contained in: CAB 16/5, "Report and Proceedings of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence Appointed by the Prime Minister to Consider the Military Needs of the Empire.", July 24, 1909. See also: Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 404-08; d'Ombrain, *War Machinery*, pp. 92-7, 158-60; Fisher to Esher, January 17 and March 15, 1909, *FGDN* v.2, pp. 220, 232-3, where Fisher reveals his intentions and motives for not divulging the Admiralty's amphibious plans to the CID sub-committee.

⁷⁸ "War Plans and the Distribution of the Fleet.", December 1908, 10 pp., ADM 116/1043B, Part 1.

War within striking distance of the enemy....At such a time the North Sea should swarm with our Destroyers and Submarines backed with their supporting Cruisers.”⁷⁹ While this statement supports the “flotilla defence” contention,⁸⁰ at no time did he define whether he preferred a defensive strategy over offensive proposals in the war plans. Fisher did not condemn the close blockade concept outlined in Plans B-D and W.3., although he believed it unwise to place the British fleets in harm’s way of German flotillas *before* the outbreak of war. Approving an “observational” blockade on the German littoral, the seizure of Borkum and Sylt, and operations to neutralise the Elbe exit, Fisher sanctioned Plans W.1. and W.2., which repeated Wilson’s 1907 arguments for an “observational” blockade.⁸¹

Antithetical to this endorsement and another example of his erratic strategic thought, was Fisher’s views on the submarine’s effectiveness. In a November 1908 paper entitled, “The Submarine Question.”, he stressed the submarine’s ability to remain “autonomous” from refuelling for extended periods and that: “No practicable means at present exist or appear to be feasible for effecting the destruction of the latest type of submarine, or of being even warned of her approach.” Given these factors, British naval forces would be precluded from steaming in the North Sea and Baltic with impunity.

It is inevitable that when the Germans fully realise the capability of this type of submarine-....the North Sea and all its parts will be rendered uninhabitable by our big ships-until we have cleaned out the submarines....The arguments in this brief record in no way attempt to lessen the influence and necessity of big armoured ships....They do however point to a complete approaching revolution

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4; Mackay, *Fisher*, p. 369.

⁸⁰ See footnote 44, above.

⁸¹ Fisher’s “Commentary” on the War Plans indicates that while he did not reject a close blockade, he was perhaps more inclined towards an observational blockade with advanced bases as outlined by Wilson and elaborated in Plans W.1.-W.2.. See: *FDSF v. I*, pp. 369-70; Mackay, *Fisher*, p. 370. N. Lambert indicts Marder and Mackay for accepting this view because they fail to account for Fisher’s predictions on the impact of the submarine, *Naval Revolution*, pp. 166-7. He, however, ignores the “Commentary”, the contents of the Admiralty’s war plans, and Fisher’s correspondence, which support Marder and Mackay. Lambert’s selective approach to sources implies that Fisher could not be of two minds over these types of operations and the submarine/destroyer threat—a contrast which Mackay recognised. See: *Fisher*, pp. 367, 417-19.

in the type of our war with *any* power, particularly with any European power on account of the narrow waters of the North Sea and Baltic, English Channel and Mediterranean being denied to large ships of war until the submarine is cleared out.⁸²

This realistic assessment contradicted the axioms behind W.1.-W.2's "observational" blockade and the other war plans endorsed in his "Commentary". Forecasting the submarine's future role, Fisher was of two minds over its capabilities and his support for "watching" squadrons, the seizure of advanced bases, and riverine operations along Germany's North Sea littoral, not to mention a Baltic campaign.⁸³ That he did not modify his views or reject the Admiralty War Plans in his December "Commentary" after his conclusions in the November "Submarine" paper indicates that their proposals were still considered viable.

Annotations in the "Commentary", however, confuse the issue over which specific plan, if any, Fisher preferred. There was a veiled reference to the economic advantages of a distant blockade, outlined in Plan A/A1 and suggested in W.1.:

....we are prepared to deal effectively with the 942 German mercantile vessels that cover the ocean....The geographical position of Germany immensely favours us in a maritime war. The British Isles form a huge breakwater 600 miles long barring the ingress and egress of German vessels from the ocean-Dover rendered impassable by the Destroyers and Submarines, and the Northern passage from the North Sea to the Atlantic can be as completely barred.⁸⁴

The reference to Britain as a "breakwater", repeated Ottley's July 1905 views that an economic blockade of the entire German seaboard could be effectively maintained.⁸⁵ Months before the Ballard Committee's creation, Fisher again alluded to the "breakwater" analogy allowing the Navy to "mop up" 800 German steamers at a

⁸² "The Submarine Question.", November 1908, Fisher MSS, FISR/5/13, # 4238, Churchill College Archives, Cambridge.

⁸³ Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 367-8.

⁸⁴ "War Plans and the Distribution of the Fleet.", ADM 116/1043B, Part 1, pp. 9-10.

⁸⁵ Ottley to Julian Corbett, July 1, 1905, RIC/9, Richmond MSS, Papers Belonging to Julian Corbett, NMM.

conflict's outset.⁸⁶ The "Commentary's" suggestions to close the Straits of Dover and the northern Orkney-Shetland-Norway gap, was a direct reference to Plan A/A1's distant blockade.⁸⁷ This does not, however, confirm that Fisher preferred that strategy over other proposals in the "W" series or earlier war plans. Slade's "Preamble" and the "Introductory Remarks" to Plans A-C clearly outlined that the Navy's chief objective was to pressure Germany's commercial interests through attacks on its overseas commerce and ports; no similar guidelines exist in the "W" plans.⁸⁸ The discrepancy between the two series lies in Fisher's reorganisation of the Admiralty's thinking establishments. With planning stripped from the NID, Ballard on active sea command, and Ottley's and Hankey's move to the CID, Slade was the only remaining Admiralty "economist" from the original 1907 planners.⁸⁹ After the Strategy Committee's creation, the DNI's influence over planning was diminished to that of a messenger between Fisher and the War College. Thus, the offensive premises behind the "W" series reflected Fisher's concern over the Baltic entrances and was an expedient response to any flare-up in European tensions. While an economic war against Germany had been investigated by Captain Henry H. Campbell in the NID's Trade Division since 1906, that work was merely an offshoot of the offensive/observational strategy developed from the 1890's onwards.⁹⁰

Fisher's inference in the "Commentary" to an economically motivated distant

⁸⁶ Fisher to S. Fortesque (Royal equerry), April 14, 1906, *FGDN* v.2, p. 72.

⁸⁷ Refer to Chapter 3, above; Kemp, *Fisher Papers* v.2, pp. 372-94.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 346-62, 362-7, 372, 382-3, 393-4, 395-6, 408, 432-3, 436. For the introductions to the "W" series plans, refer to: "War Plans. Germany. W.1.-W.3.", ADM 116/1043B, Volume 1, pp. 350-560; "War Plan W.4. England v. Germany and the United States of America.", December 8, 1908, pp. 596-625.

⁸⁹ Offer, *First World War*, pp. 232-9, 273-81.

⁹⁰ This contradicts Offer, who believes that Fisher's strategic mindset was governed solely by an "economist" outlook. The Admiralty apparently confirmed its preference for an economically based blockade strategy over offensive operations in the Baltic during the CID's "Military Needs" sub-committee. See: *Ibid.*, pp. 242-3 and 229-43, 249-57, 261-3, 270-84. This will be examined in the next chapter.

blockade was likely part of his ploy to hide the Admiralty's Baltic/North Sea planning from the Army and politicians during the CID "Military Needs" sub-committee. Instead of forwarding the Zealand expedition proposal critiqued by the DMO, Slade presented an economic plan for a blockade of Germany before the Defence Committee on 17th December, 1908. The timing of this meeting, the drafting of War Plan W.4., and similarities between Fisher's "Commentary" and Slade's paper all coincided.⁹¹ While it has been argued: "it is therefore quite possible that a strand of the First Sea Lord's real thinking is represented by the cautious but realistic plans preferred by the Ballard committee.",⁹² there is no evidence that he preferred A/A1's distant blockade over the other war plans. The "Commentary" and "Submarine" paper suggest that, by late 1908, Fisher was more apt to implement the cautious estimates of Wilson and W.1.-W.2. at the outbreak of a conflict than an offensive push into the Baltic or against the German North Sea littoral.

V.

Critiques of the "W" series focussed on inconsistencies in Plans, W.1.--W.2.. Beresford's June 1908 campaign plan for the Channel Fleet included observations that inshore squadrons off the Elbe, Weser, and Ems were not possible at the outbreak of war. The October 1907 Manoeuvres had, "proved the impossibility of having an Inner Squadron owing to the shortage of small ships and limited radius of action of the Thirty-Knot Destroyers."⁹³ The C-in-C believed that the manoeuvres indicated that main fleet operations near the German coast would be costly if German torpedo-craft ventured out undetected at night. While the British Fleet should be positioned to support its cruisers and engage the High Sea Fleet it sortied, "it should not as a rule, be less than 200 miles from the German ports between sunset and sunrise. Cruisers attached to the main fleet

⁹¹ "Economic Effect of a War on German Trade.", December 12, 1908, (17 pp.), Appendix V., CAB 16/5, "Report and Proceedings of a Sub-Committee....on the Military Needs of the Empire.", July 24, 1909; Offer, *The First World War*, pp. 242-3; footnotes 69 and 71, above.

⁹² Mackay, *Fisher*, p. 370.

⁹³ C-in-C Channel Fleet, Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, to the Secretary of the Admiralty, "Second Plan of Action for British Fleet.", June 1, 1908, ADM 116/1037.

will watch the Skaggerak and search all waters north of a line drawn from Spurn Point to the German-Danish border.”⁹⁴ These recommendations dovetailed with W.1.’s central premise to keep the British fleet at least 170 miles off the German coast at night.

October 1908 correspondence between Beresford and the Admiralty queried W.1.-W.2.’s provision to place British fleet units near the Heligoland Bight to cut off German forces issuing from the Elbe or Jade. Beresford was wary of any operations in or near the Bight.

There is a proposal to place a weak Flotilla in the Heligoland Bight at the commencement of hostilities. It may be possible to do this after the enemy has been worsted and driven into port, but it would be impossible to maintain Destroyers and Mining Ships on the German Coast at the very beginning of the War, especially in view of the recent German increase in the numbers of Light Cruisers and Destroyers; the more powerful armament carried by the latter; and the development of Heligoland as an armed advance post. All these facts point to the intention of the Germans to resist any close blockade of their coast, and to obtain command of their inner waters--the Heligoland Bight.⁹⁵

His appraisal was cognisant of W.1.’s contention that a close blockade was dangerous due to German torpedo-craft. Beresford went beyond the War College assessments, however, and recognised the advantages for German defences with Heligoland as a forward base. Commenting on the logistical/communications difficulties for the “observational” line near Heligoland, Beresford declared: “The British Force must be divided into reliefs, and operates about 200 miles from the British Coast, whilst the German Force in addition to their greater numbers, are working close to their bases.” This problem was compounded by the fact that the “observational” blockade was a dissipation of strength which subjected British squadrons to concentrated German attacks.⁹⁶ Beresford recognised that W.1.’s alternative in placing the fleet out of harm’s

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, and C-in-C Channel Fleet to Admiralty, December 9, 1907.

⁹⁵ C-in-C Channel Fleet to First Sea Lord, October 8, 1908, No. 2206/015, ADM 116/1037. These are Beresford’s remarks on the Admiralty Letter (M Branch) of July 1, 1908, “Secret and Personal enclosing War Plan Against Germany”, part of the Admiralty’s communication of War Orders to the Channel Fleet.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

way exposed the observational squadrons to a potential defeat in detail. It was a weakness identified by other officers in the Fleet.

Junior officers familiar with the War College's work were privately aware of foibles in the "W" series plans. In October 1908 the War Division ADNI, Captain Osmond de Brock, condemned the military expedition to Zealand as "a mass of verbiage."⁹⁷ One of the more promising officers in the "Fishpond", Commander (later Admiral Sir) Herbert Richmond was involved with the "W" series while serving as Fisher's Naval Assistant. His advocacy for a naval staff, in collusion with Corbett and Slade, collided with the *ad hoc* nature of planning under Fisher's control. In April 1907 Richmond denounced the Admiralty's handling of strategic planning as: "beneath contempt."⁹⁸

Appointed Flag Captain to the Home Fleet C-in-C, Admiral Sir William May, in early 1909, Richmond's views became more extreme. He harshly condemned the "observational" blockade premise of W.1.-W.3..

The Admiralty's plans are to my mind the vaguest amateur stuff I have ever seen. I cannot conceive how they were discussed or what ideas governed the framers of them. Weak dissipation of strength all along the line is the most marked characteristic....Destroyers are used sometimes as scouts, or torpedo boats, sometimes as destroyers for attacking enemy torpedo craft. No clear idea of how they are to be used or what they are doing is laid down. Cruisers are scattered in long vague patrols....As it is, it is simply a jumble without form. Destroyers in small numbers are used to patrol the Skaggerak. No seaman can have arranged this, certainly no one with a knowledge of destroyers.⁹⁹

With limited available destroyers, Richmond suggested an alteration in W.1.'s pickets off the German coast. The inshore patrol should be maintained by fast light cruisers and replaced by destroyers at night. With their higher speed and wireless telegraphy, light cruisers were more effective at watching the German rivers and communicating enemy

⁹⁷ Quoted in Mackay, *Fisher*, p. 405.

⁹⁸ Richmond Journal, April 4, 1907, Richmond MSS, RIC/1/7, NMM; B. D. Hunt, *Sailor-Scholar: Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, 1871-1946*, (Waterloo, 1982), pp. 19-20.

⁹⁹ Journal, May 2, 1909, Richmond MSS, RIC/1/8, NMM.

movements. Concentrated armoured cruiser squadrons positioned behind the inshore squadrons could quickly converge on enemy squadrons emitting to disrupt the British patrols. Another concern, using the “watch” on the Skagerrak as an example, was the large force needed to guard against any variety of enemy concentrations seeking to break through the British cordons.¹⁰⁰

Clarifying ambiguities in the “W” series, Richmond recognised the dangers associated with observational squadrons off the German rivers, the watch on the Skagerrak, and the long blockade line between Terschelling and Horn’s Reef. Sharing Beresford’s criticisms, he thought “watching” squadrons could only be maintained by the proper deployment of armoured and light cruisers. The antidote was the fast, scouting-type cruiser.

The light fast unarmoured cruiser is the proper vessel for look-out work, supported by a squadron of armoured cruisers so placed that they can move to any point and cut off an enemy whose approach is signalled by the unarmoured line....scouts are the proper vessels for this outlook work: speed is essential: sea keeping powers and a considerable radius of action are wanted; an armament sufficient to deal with destroyers: and a power of cruising economically with power to increase rapidly to at least 15 knots: an efficient wireless telegraphy installation is of course absolutely essential, & protection if any should be below the water to resist Torpedo attack rather than above water against gunnery attack, against which speed is her defensive armour.¹⁰¹

Richmond’s emphasis on speed, wireless, underwater defence against torpedo attack, and an effective armament to deal with destroyers, indicated that such cruisers were required for the “observational” lines outlined in War Plans W.1.- W.3..

Beresford too, had demanded more light cruisers in his condemnations of Admiralty policy. In June 1908 correspondence with McKenna on shipbuilding policy, Beresford argued that more light cruisers were required for the “preliminary struggle” with Germany involving a fight for the “command of the inshore area” and combined

¹⁰⁰ “Remarks on War Plans. 1909-1910.”, Richmond MSS, RIC/13/4, NMM.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

operations in the Baltic.¹⁰² Both officers had thus realised the necessity for this type of vessel in operations off the German rivers and North Sea coast. The Admiralty had, however, already projected a remedy, ironically, along the same lines as Richmond's and Beresford's recommendations.

The Admiralty had considered replacing its old unarmoured cruisers in 1906 before the Ballard Committee's planning work. In November 1907, the Navy Estimates Committee discussed the inclusion of new scout cruisers under the 1908-09 Naval Estimates. There was, "a strong consensus of opinion" among the Committee members, "that a type of *unarmoured* vessel was also urgently necessary to act as parent-vessels to the large and increasingly numerous flotillas of our Destroyers when operating on an enemy's coast, as well as to meet vessels of the same type now being built by foreign nations." These cruisers were described by the then DNO, Rear-Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, as forming an "inshore watching squadron" with destroyers off enemy ports. Accordingly, the Committee decided to include five improved *Boadecias* in the Estimates.¹⁰³ New construction under the 1908-09 Estimates incorporated six cruisers (including *Boadecia*).¹⁰⁴ The sudden switch in building policy to provide the new cruisers was not a reversal of reforms initiated by the Fisher administration in 1904, but a subtle transformation. Despite the removal of redundant vessels, the stricture that procurement act as the "acid test" of strategy was not shelved. In the guidelines to his reform package, Fisher had realised that altered strategic exigencies would dictate the

¹⁰² Beresford to Vice-Admiral A.B. Milne, April 22, 1909, containing enclosure sent by Beresford to First Lord, June 5, 1908, "The Shipbuilding Policy as it Affects the Fighting Efficiency of the Fleet.", pp. 13, 16, Milne MSS, MLN/227, NMM. Also refer to: Slade Diary, January 7, 1908, MRF/39/3, regarding the DNI's discussions with Beresford about war plans. Beresford: "....was very insistent on the lack of cruisers to carry out what he wanted to do."

¹⁰³ Quote and information from the November 1907 Navy Estimates Committee, pp. 12-19 taken from Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 386-7. The original print is in the Fisher MSS, No. 4724 at Churchill College, Cambridge.

¹⁰⁴ "Statement of the First Lord of the Admiralty Explanatory of the Navy Estimate, 1908-09.", and "Details of New Construction: Dockyard Built Ships-cont.", in *Navy Estimates for the Year 1908-1909, with Explanation of Differences Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 30 January 1908.*, (London, 1908), pp. 4, 200-1, 224-5.

vessel types required by the Fleet. In the first volume of *Naval Necessities* (1904) he had trumpeted:

Strategy should govern the types of ships to be designed
Ship design, as dictated by strategy, should govern tactics
*Tactics should govern details of armaments.*¹⁰⁵

The Admiralty's 1908-09 building program provided the vessels to meet operational requirements along the German North Sea coast as stipulated by the 1907 contingencies and the "observational" blockade proposal in the W.1.-W.3. plans.

There are other indications that the "W" series were considered viable in the event of war with Germany. During the July 1908 Manoeuvres, *Blue* Fleet (German) commanded by Beresford, was to engage a numerically superior, but divided, *Red* Fleet (British) under the Home Fleet C-in-C, Vice-Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman. *Red* would watch *Blue* and proscribe Beresford's movement until Bridgeman's fleet was reinforced. To unite with the main force, *Red* reinforcements had to pass through straits "XX" or "YY" without being detected or engaged. The scenario conformed to W.1.-W.2., where the British fleet was forced to watch the Elbe and Skagerrak for High Seas Fleet sorties. Beresford placed his battle fleet to cover Strait "XX" and a detached squadron of cruisers (armoured and unarmoured) and 27-knot destroyers to watch "YY". The manoeuvres, however, produced no major engagement and failed to resolve the special question on the impact of submarines and mines as neither admiral attempted to discover the others whereabouts--a dereliction for which both were censured.¹⁰⁶ The exercise did produce a pertinent appraisal of W.1.-W.6.'s proposals to employ British destroyers off the German coast/rivers. In his evaluation, Slade reviewed Beresford's "watch" on Strait "YY" and surmised that:

¹⁰⁵ P.K. Kemp (ed), *The Papers of Admiral Sir John Fisher, Volume 1.*, (London, 1960), p. 40.

¹⁰⁶ Lord Charles Beresford, July Manoeuvres 1908, "Report of Proceedings of Blue Fleet.", and "Remarks by Commander-in-Chief on Manoeuvre Report and Lesson to be Learnt.", August 23, 1908, (8 pp.); From Admiralty to Commander-in-Chief, Channel Fleet, "Memorandum on Fleet Exercises in the North Sea, July 1908.", November 16, 1908, Noel MSS, NOE/11B, Manoeuvres 1908, NMM.

A point which comes out very clearly in these manoeuvres is that the 27 knot boats will be of very little use at any distance from our own coasts. We cannot depend upon them for use on the German coast unless we can find some secure base for them. If this cannot be done we may write them off for offensive purposes, although they still will have a very useful field of action in the local defence of the coasts.¹⁰⁷

Slade's remedy for the 27 knotters' liabilities repeated the forward base concept as a concession to the limitations of early British destroyers in blockade operations as examined in Ballard's 1897 RUSI essay, Hankey's May 1904 advanced fleet base scheme, and the NID's July 1904 plans to seize Ushant as an advanced base for a Brest/Cherbourg blockade and Heligoland in a war against Germany.¹⁰⁸ The taking of Borkum or Sylt, as prescribed under Plan B/C and W.2., would have rectified this problem. The DNI's observations indicated a link between the manoeuvre's lessons and North Sea scenarios in the "W" series.

Further evolutions addressed destroyer deployments in the Heligoland Bight. An October 1908 Home Fleet flotilla exercise examined the practicality of W.1.-W.3.'s "observational" patrols off the German estuaries. Two *River* Class destroyer squadrons, accompanied by unarmoured cruisers, were involved in the exercise: "B" Squadron simulating a British blockading flotilla; "A" Squadron representing the Germans. The exercise, "was intended to simulate an attempt of German Destroyers during a war with England, trying to get from the mouths of the Jade and Weser Rivers to the 'Elbe'."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ "Memorandum by DNI on Manoeuvres.", July 1908, p. 7. Slade MSS, MRF/39/3, NMM.

¹⁰⁸ Refer to Chapters 1 and 2, above; Ballard, "The Protection of Commerce During War.", pp. 402-04; Hankey, "Advanced Bases for the Fleet", May 2, 1904, Hankey MSS, HNKY/6/3, Churchill College, Cambridge; Battenberg, "The Organisation for War of Torpedo Craft in Home Waters.", July 4, 1904, *Naval Necessities* v.2, pp.508-19, ADM 116/3093, Case 0026. Also refer to: Manning, *White*, for further discussion of the advanced base concept resulting from the limitations of 27 and 30 knot destroyers in any projected blockade of Brest and Cherbourg.

¹⁰⁹ From Vice-Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman to the Secretary of the Admiralty, October 31, 1908, "Destroyers Watching Mouths of Rivers-Exercise Carried out by Eastern Group." Three enclosures: Commodore (T) Lewis Bayly to C-in-C Home Fleet, October 9; C-in-C Home Fleet to Commodore (T), October 17; Commodore (T) to C-in-C Home Fleet, October 23, 1908, ADM 116/1037.

While both sides were equal in strength and the weather favourable to the blockaders, “A” effectively “broke out” twice. The British flotilla commander, Commodore (T) Lewis Bayly, concluded that the blockaders dispositions needed to be considerably larger for such operations to be effective: “The exercise was carried out as laid down in order to give the greatest amount of instruction to the greatest number; but for effective blockading, I consider the blockaders should be to the blockaded as 3 to 1,....”. Bridgeman endorsed Bayly’s recommendations in his report to the Admiralty.¹¹⁰ Bayly’s suggestion repeated earlier critiques of a modern “close” blockade in the 1889 “Three Admirals” report and the September 1902 “Argostoli” exercise in the Mediterranean.¹¹¹ Confirming the logistical weaknesses in the War College’s “observational” investment of the German estuaries, the exercise proved that the “W” series were investigated by the fleet to identify deficiencies and familiarise the flotilla crews with these types of operations.

The inshore/observational capabilities of British flotillas were again addressed by Home Fleet commanders in June 1909. Bayly’s successor as Commodore (T), E. Charlton, submitted a table to the new Home Fleet C-in-C, Admiral Sir William May, detailing coal and oil-fuel consumption rates for *River* (“E”) and *Tribal* (“F”) Class destroyers operating outbound and inbound from East Coast bases to the German North Sea river estuaries. As calculated by a junior flotilla officer, Commander Paton, the distances from Grimsby and Harwich to the Ems, Elbe, and Weser were correlated with the endurance and fuel expenditures of both destroyer types. According to the calculations, Charlton reported that both destroyer types had enough fuel to conduct offensive operations off, and even in, the German rivers for several days.

2. It will be noted from column 8 that these vessels should have enough coal remaining to spend three days on a enemy’s coast for offensive purposes. I do not think the German rivers are difficult to navigate beyond the fact that our destroyers would be working in almost unknown ground. Their work would be

¹¹⁰ Commodore(T) to C-in-C Home Fleet, October 23 and Bridgeman’s minutes on cover sheet, October 31, 1908, *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Refer to Chapter 1, above.

rendered much more difficult if buoys and marks were removed or shifted, but this should quickly become known to us as the German system of marking channels is very elaborate.¹¹²

Aside from minor hydrographic inconveniences, Charlton was optimistic about successful destroyer deployments under W.1.-W.3.'s parameters. He was equally confident that the *Tribals* could be refuelled at sea by oil-carrying lighters which would extend the duration that they could be employed off the German littoral, a factor that also won the approval the new DNI, Rear-Admiral A.E. Bethell (1909-12).¹¹³ While these exercises revealed logistical inconsistencies in the War College proposals, they were significant. The examination of these issues at a fleet level indicated that the Admiralty viewed an "observational" blockade as a viable contingency to cover other North Sea/Baltic operations outlined in the "W" series.

Coinciding with the Home Fleet flotilla reports, a series of secret hydrographic tests were conducted off Horn's Reef on Jutland's western coast in June and September 1909. Directed by the Hydrographic Department and the Admiral Commanding Coastguard and Reserves, R. Henderson, the torpedo gunboat HMS *Halcyon*, on assignment as a Fisheries Protection Vessel, conducted three days of sounding tests at various locations off the Danish port of Ebsjerg in mid-June 1909.¹¹⁴ The purpose was to discover a suitable offshore anchorage near Ebsjerg and Horn's Reef. *Halcyon's* Commander, M. Fitzmaurice, reported that a Slugrarrd Coast anchorage fulfilled the necessary requirements, as it was outside Danish territorial waters, had easy access,

¹¹² From the C-in-C Home Fleet, Admiral Sir William May to the Secretary Admiralty, June 22, 1909. Enclosures: "Report by Commander Paton, HMS *Cherwell* on River Class and Tribal Destroyers." included in, From Commodore (T) (E. Charlton), HMS *Topaze*, to the C-in-C Home Fleet, June 5, 1909, ADM 1/8040, From Admirals "X" Home Fleet, Nos. 1-1356. 1909. For *Tribal* and *River* Class destroyers, March's *British Destroyers* should be consulted, though it is not always reliable.

¹¹³ From Commodore (T), HMS *Topaze*, to the C-in-C Home Fleet, June 5, 1909; "Report by Commander Paton....on River Class and Tribal Destroyers.", ADM 1/8040.

¹¹⁴ HMS *Halcyon* remained a Fisheries Protection Vessel until 1914 when she was converted into a mine-sweeper. See: *Conway's, 1906-1922*, p. 20.

possessed good depth of water, and had ample accommodation. He concluded: "It is to be considered that this anchorage would be strategically suitable."¹¹⁵ The report was passed on to the NID and the Hydrographer, who both decided that further information was required on the degree of shelter afforded by the anchorage during westerly and northerly gales.¹¹⁶ Accordingly, *Halcyon* conducted a second series of tests in September which proved inconclusive. Danish trawlers passing through the channel under examination and the proximity of the Blaavand Point Lighthouse compromised the secret intent attached to the examinations.¹¹⁷

Halcyon's covert activities and the importance attached to a second series of anchorage tests by the NID and the Hydrographer suggest that Fitzmaurice was sent to verify aspects of the "W" series plans. The anchorage tests conformed to W.2.'s proposal to create an "extempore" breakwater on the Horn's Reef where flotillas could be refuelled/coaled and serviced by depot ships. The location of the anchorage off Ebsjerg was well situated for the seizure of Sylt as a destroyer "flying" base supporting British squadrons watching the Skagerrak, and a base for cruisers and flotillas engaged in "observational" duties near the Heligoland Bight--scenarios detailed in W.1.-W.3.. Like the Home Fleet flotilla exercises, *Halcyon's* anchorage tests confirmed that the Admiralty considered the possible implementation of the 1908 "W" series proposals in a war with Germany, especially W.1.-W.2.'s "observational" blockade off Germany's North Sea littoral and in the Skagerrak.

¹¹⁵ From Commanding Officer, H.M.S. *Halcyon*, Commander M. Fitzmaurice to Admiralty Hydrography Department, Chief Hydrographer F. Mostyn Field. "Confidential. Anchorage in Vicinity of Ebsjerg." (NID Report No. 734), June 24, 1909; Fitzmaurice to Admiral Commanding Coastguard & Reserves, July 26, 1909, ADM 116/866B, Case 4173. Detailed tracings from Admiralty Chart #1887, "Eiger River to Blaavand Point.", show the position of the anchorages in question. The chart is located in the PRO Map Room, reference: MFQ 955 (1). Also see: ADM 53/21565, "Logbook of HMS *Halcyon*, 1909, April 1 to 1910, March 23.", entries for June 18-22 and September 2-8, 1909.

¹¹⁶ Fitzmaurice to Hydrography Department, June 24, 1909; Fitzmaurice to Admiral Commanding Coastguard & Reserves, July 26, 1909, ADM 116/866B.

¹¹⁷ Secret. From Commander Fitzmaurice, H.M.S. *Halcyon*, "Anchorage in the Vicinity of Horn's Reef." to Admiral Commanding Coast Guard, Reserves, September 8, 1909, ADM 116/866B.

The “W” series war plans reflected Fisher’s continued anxiety over the Baltic *status quo* and his belief that the Foreign Office had not guaranteed the Navy’s access through the Belts and Sound in the Baltic/North Sea agreements. That this concern governed renewed planning in 1908 was evident in Foreign Office diplomacy throughout the *status quo* negotiations and the January-March 1908 work by Slade and the War College planners. Fisher’s direct approaches to aid the Swedes in deepening the Sound reveals the importance of the Baltic entrances in the Admiralty’s strategy and the motivations behind the “W” plans themselves. Although the later plans in the series, such as W.3., were also reactions to other crises in the European balance of power, they reflected Fisher’s strategic views and preliminary planning during the Baltic/North Sea negotiations.

Despite their inconsistencies, the “W” series realistically attempted to overcome the dangers associated with a close blockade of the German seaboard as outlined in 1907’s Plans B-D, while retaining an offensive edge. Proof that they, and their predecessors, were not “foils” to buttress Fisher’s policies against Beresford and “the Syndicate of Discontent” is evidenced by several factors. By late 1907, the Admiralty was committed to building the proper ships for projected inshore/blockade offensive operations through the construction of fast, light cruisers to support new, longer ranged, more seaworthy, and powerfully armed British destroyers (i.e. *Rivers*) working off Germany’s North Sea estuaries as outlined in War Plans W.1.-W.3.¹¹⁸ Ironically, the need for these vessels was also realised in Beresford’s and Richmond’s critiques of these projected operations. Home Fleet manoeuvres, destroyer exercises, and associated flotilla reports from 1908-09 validated that the “W” proposals were serious considerations since they simulated operations off the German North Sea coast/rivers.

¹¹⁸ March, *British Destroyers; Conway’s, 1906-1921*, pp. 2, 72-7. The Admiralty’s Ships Covers, ADM 138, at the Brass Foundry, Woolwich provide the technical specifications and developmental background of the new destroyer types. For the particular classes refer to: ADM 138/184a and 184a-e, *River Class*; ADM 138/242-b, *Beagle Class*; ADM 138/246-c, *Acorn Class*. The Covers for the new generation of light cruisers include: ADM 138/231-b, *Boadicea Class*; ADM 138/252, *Blonde Class*; ADM 138/240-c, *Bristol Class*; ADM 138/253&a, *Weymouth Class*; ADM 138/263&a, *Active Class*.

The June/September 1909 sounding tests to locate an anchorage off the western Danish coast also confirmed how serious the Admiralty were about the W.1.-W.3. plans. The continued emphasis on Baltic and North Sea operations reflected, as they had in 1904-07, that the Royal Navy's offensive power could only directly influence Germany in these two vital strategic regions, (i.e.) its exits to the North Sea. While Fisher may have been anxious about Beresford's opposition, he was equally concerned about losing access to the Baltic. The 1908 war plans continued the broad outlines of the offensive axiom initiated in the 1890's— the projection of the Navy's strength against an enemy's vitals.

Chapter Five: Probes into Admiralty War Planning, 1908-1909.

I.

The inter-relationship between naval planning, diplomacy, fleet exercises, a new light cruiser procurement policy, even HMS *Halcyon*'s covert activities off western Jutland, had all revealed the validity of the Admiralty's 1907-08 war plans. By late 1908, however, the Navy's strategy garnered unwanted attention from several quarters, especially Fisher's Service opponents and "continental" advocates. His reactions to these perceived intrusions from the Cabinet and Army would later affect the Navy's strategic development into the First World War. Weaknesses in the Admiralty's strategic policy were supposedly revealed at the 23rd August 1911 CID meeting during the second Moroccan Crisis. Before Agadir, however, the "Military Needs of the Empire" subcommittee (December 1908, March 1909) and the Beresford Inquiry (May-July, 1909), had placed the Admiralty on the defensive over its strategic preparations for war with Germany. Any evaluation of planning in the 1909-1914 period must examine the impact of these subcommittees on the direction of the Admiralty's planning, the question of a naval staff, and the attitudes of the First Sea Lord.

At the "Military Needs" inquiry, Fisher deliberately misrepresented the intent behind the 1907-08 war plans. Beresford's campaign against the Admiralty's policies was another matter. The CID provided the former C-in-C Channel with a high level forum to attack alleged discrepancies in the war plans. During this investigation, the Ballard and Strategy Committee studies were officially revealed for the first time. Despite Beresford's and Admiral Sir Reginald Custance's efforts to discredit the plans, they retained their relevance. The malcontents even supported an observational blockade on Germany's North Sea littoral and the entrances to the Skagerrak/Kattegat as outlined in the "W" series plans.

While Admiralty war planning was validated during the "Beresford Inquiry", its overall strategic policy did not escape scrutiny. The related question of a naval staff and Fisher's reaction proved the most debilitating to the future development of war plans.

The Navy War Council's creation in October 1909 satisfied the CID's recommendations, but reinforced the First Sea Lord's hegemony over all planning matters. This body finally dethroned the NID as the Navy's traditional "staff" and principal war planning department, a position it had held since 1887. An experienced and reasoned system of operational planning, in existence for over two decades, was effectively eliminated. With Sir A.K. Wilson's inauguration as Fisher's successor, the Navy's strategic planning took a confused and tortuous path reflecting the latter's reactions to the CID probes into Admiralty policy. Although the premises behind the Navy's offensive designs were sound, Fisher's absence, Wilson's autocracy, and a misinterpretation of the original intent behind the 1907-08 plans, retarded the progress of the Admiralty's war planning into the First World War.

II.

As the 1908 "W" plans neared completion, the CID attempted to coordinate British naval and military policy in the event of an European war. Set against the Casablanca incident and Austria's annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in October 1908, Rear-Admiral Ottley, now CID Secretary, persuaded Asquith to convene a special committee to consider Britain's defence requirements as influenced by Europe. The CID's "Military Needs of the Empire" subcommittee met on 3rd, 17th December and 23rd March 1909, and placed the Navy's strategy up for scrutiny. Chaired by the Prime Minister it included representatives from the CID, Admiralty, Army, and Foreign Office.¹ Before its first meeting, a joint General Staff/DMO critique of the Naval War College's June 1908 proposal for a military expedition to Zealand, placed Fisher on the defensive. The War Office's 27th November memorandum repeated the DMO's 1905-06 arguments against amphibious Baltic operations in favour of the "continental" plan

¹ "Report and proceedings of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence Appointed by the Prime Minister to Consider the Military Needs of the Empire.", March 1909, CAB 16/5. The Final Report of the Sub-Committee is dated July 24, 1909. Members of the sub-committee were: Asquith as chairman; the First Marquess of Crewe; Sir Charles Hardinge; McKenna; Fisher; Slade; Captain A. E. Bethell (replaced Slade as DNI in March 1909); Richard B. Haldane, Minister for War; General Sir John French; General Sir William Nicholson, CIGS; Major-General J.S. Ewert, DMO; Lord Esher; and Ottley.

to support the French frontier armies.² This exacerbated an increasingly intransigent Fisher. His refusal to disclose the Navy's Baltic designs to the "Military Needs" subcommittee was evident as Slade remarked on 28th November: "Sir J. wanted to see me about the meeting on Thursday on the subject of the Military Needs of the Empire. His view is that we had better not say anything at all about it."³ This self-enforced "close-down" followed a favourable War College re-evaluation of the old plan to block the Elbe--revealing the Admiralty's commitment to a potential Baltic campaign against Germany.⁴

Fisher's attitude throughout the "Military Needs" inquiry alternated between deliberate subterfuge and outright obduracy. When the General Staff presented their 27th November memorandum before the sub-committee on 3rd December, Fisher apparently initiated some form of outburst at the Army. Neither the subcommittee minutes nor Slade's diary reveal that he perpetrated a scene with other sources differing on the severity, context, and date of this alleged diatribe. Fisher categorised the Army's "continental" strategy as "suicidal idiocy" and allegedly advocated an amphibious landing in Pomerania. Given his intention not to discuss the Admiralty's Baltic plans at the CID, this exposition was unlikely.⁵ Vehemently opposed to the BEF's despatch to the continent, Fisher nonetheless gave the Prime Minister the Admiralty's "guarantee" that the Army would be safely transported to France in the event of war. Fisher declined Asquith's offer that troops could be provided for offensive naval operations due to the considerable time required to mobilise military formations. The

² *Ibid.*, "Memorandum by the General Staff", November 27, 1908, Appendix IV. Refer to Chapter Four above, foot note 59; Mackay, *Fisher*, p. 405; *FDSF V.1.*, pp. 385-7.

³ Slade Diary entry, November 28, 1908, MRF 39/3, Slade Papers, NMM.

⁴ Slade Diary entry, November 19, 1908, MRF 39/3, Slade Papers, NMM.

⁵ Admiral Sir R. Bacon, *The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, Volume 2*. (London, 1929), pp. 182-3. Williamson's *Grand Strategy*, p. 109, follows Bacon's interpretation of Fisher's tirade at the Army but gives a more accurate portrayal of events based on the CID minutes. Also see: Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 404-07.

Admiralty had to immediately implement measures at the outbreak of war.⁶ Fisher declined the offer for troops and reversed his January 1906 views over safeguarding “the Ferry” to France to deflect attention away from the Navy’s offensive planning. His reluctance to reveal the Admiralty’s plans to the CID, Army, and Cabinet, was motivated by the need to safeguard strategic policy from criticism by these departments and, by extension, the internal Service opposition led by Beresford.⁷ Fisher’s decision not to communicate details of the Admiralty’s 1908 contingencies to the C-in-C Channel was evident in early January 1908. Attempting to improve relations between the two protagonists via strategic issues, Slade eventually acquiesced to Fisher’s view that the entire planning spectrum be deliberately kept from Beresford.⁸ As the “Military Needs” sub-committee progressed, so would the distortion of the Admiralty’s true strategic agenda.

Fisher skirted the issue of the Navy’s offensive plans before the CID sub-committee for fear that they may be “leaked” to the “Syndicate of Discontent”. At the 17th December meeting, the Admiralty presented Slade’s blockade memorandum, “The Economic Effect of War on German Trade”. Maritime economic pressure directed at Germany would be enough to bring her to terms, considering her large seaborne trade and dependence on overseas raw materials and foodstuffs. Slade advocated Britain’s traditional policy of denying Dutch and Belgian ports to hegemonic European powers.⁹ The CIGS, Nicholson, unable to challenge Slade’s statistics on the effect of a naval war on German commerce, commented that Germany would overrun France before

⁶ Minutes of the first meeting of the “Military Needs” sub-committee, December 3, 1908, CAB 16/5, PRO.

⁷ Mackay, *Fisher*, pp.404-06.

⁸ Refer to Chapter Four above; Slade Diary, January 6-8, 1908, Slade MSS, MRF/39/3, NMM; Schurman, *Corbett*, pp. 73-8.

⁹ “The Economic Effect of War on German Trade”, December 12, 1908, CAB 16/5, Appendix V., pp. 20-7.

economic pressure became effective.¹⁰ Although the paper was accepted by the Defence Committee it was not, as some have suggested, a definitive representation of the Navy's actual strategy.¹¹ At best, it was a "smokescreen", representing only the broad outlines of the Admiralty's strategy, deliberately introduced to draw the sub-committee away from the North Sea/Baltic plans recently castigated by the War Office. Slade's discourse did not distinguish which strategy was more effective between the two options on the Admiralty's books: the distant blockade outlined in Plan A/A1 and Plans W.1.-W.2., or a close investment against Germany's North Sea coast as stipulated in the specimen Plan B/B1 and W.3., Part 1. The DNI avoided reference to Germany's important Baltic commerce, especially the Swedish iron-ore trade, which was the underlying motive behind the Admiralty's offensive Baltic designs, (i.e.) Plan C/C1 and Plan W.3. Part 2.¹²

The sub-committee also considered a memorandum from Lord Esher, Fisher's friend and supporter. A staunch navalist, he strongly opposed sending an expeditionary force to France because British troops would be placed under French command.¹³ Attempting to "scuttle" the "continental" strategy, Esher advocated that the government support the Navy's proposed war on German trade, a close North Sea blockade, and an amphibious army for sudden descents on the enemy's territory. Placating the soldiers, Esher proposed that a token force of six mounted brigades (12,000 men) be sent to aid the French. Nicholson and General French rejected Esher's recommendations on technical grounds and the fact that "command of the sea" would not affect the

¹⁰ Minutes of the third meeting of the "Military Needs" sub-committee, Thursday March 23, 1909, CAB 16/5.

¹¹ "Report of the Sub-Committee....to Consider the Military Needs of the Empire", July 24, 1909, CAB 16/5, p. viii.; Offer, *The First World War*, pp. 242-3.

¹² "The Economic Effect of War on German Trade", CAB 16/5, Appendix V., pp. 20-7. For Plans C/C1 (1907) and W.3., Part 2., (1908) refer to Chapters Three and Four above.

¹³ Brett and Esher Oliver (eds), *Esher v. 2*, Entry for November 9, 1908, pp. 357-8.

“immediate issue” of land battles along the Franco-German frontier.¹⁴ French’s opposition was damaging since he was Esher’s friend, an anti-continentalist”, and supporter of amphibious operations.¹⁵ Esher’s unequivocal defence of the Admiralty revealed his role as Fisher’s ally in the debate over Britain’s national strategy. Fisher obviously kept him apprised of the Navy’s broader strategy, though not the details of actual contingencies.

Fisher’s refusal to disclose war plans was compounded by further challenges to his administration. During the infamous 1909 Naval Scare (January-February), the Admiralty faced accusations that their incompetence had caused the loss of Britain’s lead in dreadnought construction to Germany.¹⁶ At the beginning of the crisis, Fisher informed Esher of his intention not to divulge the Navy’s plans to anyone, especially the CID and Beresford.

I rather want to keep clear of Defence Committee till Morocco [Casablanca Crisis] is settled, as I don’t want to disclose my plan of campaign to *anyone*, not even C.B. [Beresford] himself. I haven’t even told Ottley and don’t mean to. The only man who knows is Wilson, and he’s as close as wax! The whole success will depend on *suddenness and unexpectedness*, and the moment I tell anyone there’s an end to both!!! So just please keep me clear of any conferences, and I personally would sooner Defence Committee kept *still*. I’m seeing about the transports. I started it about 7 weeks ago and got 3 of my best satellites on it (*unknown to Ottley*), so you’ll think me a villain of the deepest dye!¹⁷

His allusion to Wilson, “transports”, and “satellites”, was to a paper on Baltic

¹⁴ “Assistance to be given by Great Britain to France if she is Attacked by Germany, Note by Lord Esher”, December 14, 1908; Minutes of the second meeting of the “Military Needs” sub-committee, December 17, 1908; Report of the Sub-Committee....to consider the “Military Needs of the Empire”, July 24, 1909, p. ix., CAB 16/5. d’ Ombrain, *War Machinery*, pp. 94-5; Williamson, *Grand Strategy*, pp. 109-10.

¹⁵ d’ Ombrain, pp. 145-6; Brett & Esher (eds), *Esher v.2.*, pp. 185, 187, 226, 268, 326, 333, 355, 379, 404, 435; Major-General Gerald French, *The Life of Field-Marshal Sir John French*, (London, 1931).

¹⁶ *FDSF v.1.*, pp. 151-85; Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 408-10.

¹⁷ Fisher to Esher, January 17, 1909, *FGDN v.2.*, p. 220.

operations being prepared for the last CID “Needs” sub-committee meeting.¹⁸ Indicating the reasons for his reluctance to divulge Admiralty planning to the CID (i.e. security and Beresford), Fisher’s correspondence and other evidence validated that the 1907-08 plans remained serious considerations.

In late February 1909, Fisher directed the Fourth Sea Lord, Vice-Admiral A.L. Winsloe, and the Admiralty’s Transportation Department that alterations were required for coal and oil provisions to the home fleets in the event of war. Under a new system, fuel would be sent immediately to the fleets to fill bunkers during the imminent period before hostilities. Additional coal in colliers would be stationed at coastal ports, “as close as possible to the scene of operations” to resupply the fleets or join them at sea as required. These arrangements included “offensive flotillas” to be coaled at two “advanced positions”: a Northern position or base comprised of the 2nd Flotilla and 6th Division (1 parent ship, 1 cruiser, 4 *Scouts*, 46 Torpedo-Boat Destroyers); a Southern base consisting of the 1st Flotilla and 5th Division (1 parent ship, 2 cruisers, 3 *Scouts*, 31 Destroyers). Large colliers would resupply destroyers lying alongside in rough weather. If necessary, battleships and cruisers would be “strictly required” to limit oil fuel expenditure except in emergency to allow destroyers to carry out their operations. Reference was made to the oil supply for the Flotilla Leader HMS *Swift* and the Scouting Cruiser HMS *Boadicea*, vessels specifically designed to support flotillas engaged in inshore operations.¹⁹ Fisher did not indicate the locations of the advanced “bases” but the arrangement alluded to observational “watches” near the Skaw and along the German North Sea littoral as outlined in Plans B-C, Wilson’s “Remarks”, and the “W” series plans W.1.- W.2. The fleet coal/oil supply reorganisation conformed to

¹⁸ Report and Proceedings of a Sub-Committee...on the Military Needs of the Empire, “Appendix X. Naval Considerations regarding Military Action in Denmark.”, February 4, 1909, pp. 45-8., CAB 16/5.

¹⁹ First Sea Lord to Fourth Sea Lord, “Re: Arrangements for the supply of Coal and Oil Fuel, in war, to ships in Home waters.”, February 20, 1909, MT 23/229, Admiralty. Transport Department: Correspondence & Papers, PRO., pp. 1-2, 6-8, 17. I am indebted to Warwick Brown for providing me with this reference. For specifications and development of HMS *Swift*, see: Gray (ed), *Conway’s 1906-1922*, p. 73; Brown, *Warrior*, p. 195.

October 1908 and June 1909 Home Fleet flotilla exercises and HMS *Halcyon*'s June/September 1909 sounding tests on the Horn's Reef. This confirmed that "watches" on the North Sea estuaries and the Skaw were projected as preliminary operations in a war with Germany.²⁰ Despite the CID probe, work continued on the Admiralty's offensive designs.

By March 1909, the Admiralty was under considerable pressure from Fisher's "feud" with Beresford, the Naval Scare, and the introduction of the revised 1909-10 Naval Estimates. These strains only heightened Fisher's resolve to keep the Navy's war plans under a tighter rein. On 15th March he expressed voiced his motives to Esher, implying that the Navy's strategy entailed inshore/amphibious operations in the North Sea and Baltic.

The General Staff criticism is, on the other hand, the thin end of the insidious wedge of our taking part in continental war as apart absolutely from coastal military expeditions in pure concert with the Navy-expeditions involving hell to the enemy because backed by an invincible Navy (the citadel of the military force). I don't desire to mention these expeditions and never will, as our military organisation is so damnably leaky! [potentially to Beresford] but it so happens for two solid hours this morning I have been studying one of them of inestimable value only involving 5, 000 men and some guns, and horses about 500-a mere fleabite! but a collection of these fleabites would make Wilhelm scratch himself with fury!....*Are we or are we not going to send a British Army to fight on the Continent as quite distinct and apart from coastal raids and seizures of islands, etcetera, which the Navy dominate?*²¹

Another consideration affected Fisher's pugnacity over the disclosure of war plans. Coinciding with the final "Needs" sub-committee meeting was Beresford's impending resignation as C-in-C Channel Fleet on 24th March.²² Any further criticism of naval planning might have given Beresford additional ammunition for his attacks on Admiralty policy in the public sphere.

²⁰ Refer to Chapters Three and Four, above.

²¹ Fisher to Esher, March 15, 1909, *FGDN* v.2., pp. 232-3.

²² *FDSF* v.1., pp. 103-4, 188; Fisher to Viscount Knollys, December 22, 1908, *FGDN* v.2., pp. 204-5; Mackay, *Fisher*, pp. 402-3; Bennet, *Charlie B.* pp. 298-9.

During the 23rd March “Military Needs” sub-committee, the Admiralty presented a 4th February memorandum outlining possible naval/amphibious operations in Denmark, “Naval Considerations regarding Military Action in Denmark.” This was the paper referred to by Fisher in his January correspondence with Esher. It was a deliberate attempt to gauge the General Staff’s reaction and divert attention away from the Navy’s offensive plans by denigrating operations already condemned by the DMO. The paper purposely suggested the employment of French, not British, troops in the Baltic. In the case of a war between Britain and Germany alone, it ruled out any attempts to force the Belts or an expedition to Denmark. The paper deliberately emphasised the dangers posed by mines and German torpedo-craft in or near the Baltic entrances. The memorandum continued:

It is difficult to imagine a better way of playing into the hands of Germany than by sending a fleet into the Baltic; and if a military expedition is sent also so much the better for the Germans. The German ships know every part of the Belts and Baltic intimately, they are close to Kiel for support and supplies....whereas we do not know the Baltic, and would have to depend for supplies on a very long and difficult line of communications open to attack at many points.

A Baltic blockade (Plans C-D) was also downplayed due to the length of the German coastline and the “relatively insignificant local German trade” that would be effected.²³ These same considerations were not applied to scenarios involving the employment of French forces in the Baltic.

Emulating Plans C-D and W.3., Part 2., the second prescription entailed a push into the Baltic and the landing of a French military expedition in Fyen and Zealand to gain control of the Belts. This recommendation envisioned a strong French fleet forcing open the Kattegat and the Belts, while the British held the North Sea and Dover Straits.²⁴ Predictably, the Army representatives deemed it as unfeasible as the other

²³ “Naval Considerations regarding Military Action in Denmark”, Admiralty. February 4, 1909, CAB 16/5, Appendix X., pp. 46-7.

²⁴ Naval Considerations....Denmark, “The Case of War with Germany when Great Britain is Assisted by France or by France and Russia”, February 4, 1909, *Ibid.*, pp. 47-8.

combined operations advocated by the Admiralty throughout 1905-09. Surprisingly, Fisher did not object to the General Staff's assessments of the Denmark paper. He, in fact, accepted the view that Germany may occupy Fyen and Zealand and close the Belts. As an alternative, he again suggested, *a la* 1906-08, that an accommodation be reached with Sweden to deepen the Sound for a neutral passage into the Baltic.²⁵ Fisher's guile in reintroducing a plan (June 1908 War College Zealand design) previously condemned by the DMO in November 1908 and the Swedish offer worked. The Army and non-naval sub-committee members rejected the Danish proposal. The final report of the "Needs" sub-committee cited Denmark's inevitable defeat in a German invasion as implying the immediate closure of the Baltic "to ships of the largest type".²⁶ Like the "economist" paper presented at the 17th December 1908 meeting, the Denmark presentation was another "smokescreen" to divert the CID and Army from the Admiralty's actual strategy against Germany.

Although the sub-committee's final report vindicated the economic pressure that could be brought against Germany by "means of naval force alone", the Army had influenced the CID's conclusions. An economic blockade would not prevent Germany from overrunning France. While the Committee concluded: "In the event of an attack on France by Germany, the expediency of sending a military force abroad, or of relying on naval means only, is a matter of policy which can only be determined, when the occasion arises, by the Government of the day.", the report tacitly accepted the "continental" strategy. The second clause gave the General Staff a green light to continue work on the details of its plan; a design deemed "valuable" by the sub-committee.²⁷ Fisher could feel justified that his stonewalling had paid off for no definitive decision was made on Britain's national strategy, with the war plans safely

²⁵ Minutes of the third meeting of the Military Needs sub-committee, March 23, 1909, "III. Military Action in Denmark", pp. 8-9, *Ibid*.

²⁶ Report of a Sub-Committee....on Military Needs of the Empire. 1909, July 24, 1909, "III. Military Action in Denmark", p. xi., CAB 16/5.

²⁷ Report of a Sub-Committee....on the Military Needs of the Empire. 1909., July 24, 1909, *Ibid*., pp. viii-x.; Williamson, pp. 110-12; Mackay, pp. 407-8.

within the Admiralty's preserve. But the rift between the two Services was widened by the "Needs" sub-committee. Fisher's allusive 3rd December 1908 "guarantee" to transport the BEF to France, preserved the Navy's offensive strategies but later placed the Admiralty at a disadvantage when the CID again explored Britain's strategic options in 1911.

III.

Relinquishing command of the Channel Fleet, Beresford began the final stage of his campaign against the Fisher regime. Free from official censure, he accused the Admiralty of incompetence in the following areas: home fleet allocations, the Home Fleet's constitution, no campaign plan between the Admiralty and the C-in-C afloat, a shortage of small cruisers and destroyers, and the lack of a properly defended port on the East Coast.²⁸ On 19th April, Asquith appointed a CID sub-committee to investigate Beresford's accusations and the dissension rife in the Service for the past three years. In fifteen meetings from 27th April to 13th July, evidence from Beresford and his former second-in-command, Reginald Custance, was countered by the First Lord before Asquith, Lord Morley, Sir Edward Grey, Lord Crewe, and Richard Haldane. Fisher, while present, took no active role in the proceedings.²⁹ The inquiry's proceedings, its chief issues, and conclusions have been summarised elsewhere. The Cabinet's use of the CID to investigate an internal naval matter was both highly irregular and inappropriate, allowing Beresford to openly challenge the Board's supreme authority.³⁰ The Admiralty easily rebutted Beresford's accusations that no war plans existed by presenting a narrative outlining all communiques with the C-in-C on the War

²⁸ Appendices to Proceedings of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence to Inquire into Certain Questions of Naval Policy Raised by Lord Charles Beresford. 1909. 2. August 12, 1909, CAB 16/9B., PRO; Mackay, pp. 400-1.

²⁹ Report and Proceedings of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence to Inquire into Certain Questions of Naval Policy Raised by Lord Charles Beresford. 1909. CAB 16/9A., 328 pp.

³⁰ *FDSF v. I.*, pp. 189-204; Mackay, pp. 412-17; d'Ombrain, *War Machinery*, pp. 219, 231-5.

Plans/Orders matter.³¹ Beresford contradicted himself under cross-examination when he admitted that he “did get things which called themselves plans, but which did not regard as worthy of name.”³² A recent assertion that the July 1908 War Orders (Plans W.1.-W.2.) were “fake” and merely meant to placate Beresford is incorrect, given the July 1908 Channel Fleet Manoeuvres, the October 1908 Home Fleet flotilla exercises, and the February 1909 coal/oil supply reorganisation for the Home Fleets. These exercises and arrangements were all based around a North Sea-Skagerrak/Kattegat observational blockade as outlined in the War Orders.³³

The Admiralty introduced the Ballard Committee and “W” series plans to further refute Beresford’s charges. Maurice Hankey, then Assistant Naval Secretary to the CID, viewed Beresford’s allegation about a lack of war plans as an “extraordinary lapse on his part.” No doubt reluctantly, Fisher produced the 1907-08 plans to demolish Beresford’s accusations and gave the CID the first official knowledge of their existence.³⁴ The Inquiry’s final report on the war plans issue concluded: “Lord Charles Beresford’s original statement in his letter to the Prime Minister that ‘upon assuming command of the Channel Fleet I was unable to obtain any strategical scheme or plan for disposal in war of the forces under my command,’ was modified under cross-examination, and the Committee are satisfied that he had no substantial grounds for complaint in this matter.”³⁵

Beresford’s critiques of the Admiralty’s plans were a confused and contradictory evaluation of the Ballard Committee designs and the 1908 “W” series. He derided the

³¹ Fisher to McKenna, May 26, 1908, *FGDN* v.2., pp. 177-9. This letter/summary is included in the Appendices to the Beresford Inquiry proceedings, CAB 16/9B.

³² Third meeting of the “Beresford” sub-committee, 29th April, 1909, Testimony of Lord Charles Beresford, Question 636, p. 60., CAB 16/9A.

³³ Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, p. 190, also Chapter 4 & fn. 19, above.

³⁴ Hankey, *Supreme Command*, v.1., pp. 71-2; Roskill, *Hankey*, p. 97.

³⁵ Appendices to Report and Proceedings..., Part III.-War Plans and General Conclusion.”, August 12, 1909, CAB 16/9B.

1907 series as “the pedagogue’s plan”, full of platitudes and “not a plan that you can act upon; it is theoretical and not practical”--a mistaken assumption which included Corbett’s “Introduction” with the actual plans and ascribed their authorship solely to the historian.³⁶ Plan A/A1’s distant North Sea blockade was “radically unsound” and “impractical” because it was too far from the German bases and employed too many vessels in the blockading cordons. The lack of “watching” cruisers and an adequate East Coast base were also concerns--two of his principal charges against the Admiralty. These discrepancies and Plan A’s design allowed the German fleet to move undetected through the Kiel Canal and around the Skaw to the west where it could attack the British fleet in the rear. Agreeing that the object was lure the German fleet into the North Sea, Beresford decried Plan A’s “defensive” orientation and the war on German trade: “War by compartments is foolish; it prolongs it, and has never been the custom of the British Race.”³⁷ His remedy was, “we have got to have an attacking policy...we have got to watch the enemy’s coast with watching cruisers; they have only two egresses, [Elbe, Skaw] and when they come out the Admiral should know they have come out.”³⁸ Disagreeing with Plan A’s distant “watching” strategy, Beresford’s solution repeated the July 1908 War Orders comprising Plan W.1-W.2.’s “observational” blockade and Plans B-C.

Beresford’s other critiques revealed his scant analysis of the 1907 plans. Believing that Plan B/B1 was a serious contingency, he agreed with the planners that a simultaneous close blockade in the Baltic and North Sea littoral operations were unnecessary and dispersed the British Fleet. While blocking the Elbe was “sound”, if

³⁶ First meeting of the “Beresford” sub-committee, 27th April, 1907, Questions: 98-99, 108-9, p. 9.; Third meeting, 29th April, Questions: 658-664, pp. 61-2., CAB 16/9A.

³⁷ Appendices to Report and Proceedings.... August 12, 1909, “Appendix 11. Criticisms by Lord Charles Beresford of Admiralty War Plans, Part 1., (forwarded by Lord Charles Beresford, April 29, 1909), War Plans. Parts II, III, and IV., pp. 92-3, CAB 16/9B. First meeting of “Beresford” sub-committee, 27th April, 1909, Questions: 109-114, p. 9; Third meeting, 29th April, 1909, Questions: 663-672, pp. 61-2, *Ibid*.

³⁸ Report and Proceedings...., First meeting, 27th April, 1909, Question 112, p. 10; Third meeting, 29th April, 1909, Questions 582-4, pp. 51-3, CAB 16/9A.

it failed the Germans could defeat either British fleet in detail. Even if the Elbe obstruction held and the whole British fleet were despatched to the Baltic, Britain was left open to invasion. Additional concerns included the logistical problems of moving past Kiel and resupply difficulties for a British fleet blockading German Baltic ports. Deeming Plan A “impossible”, Beresford glossed over Plans C and D as possessing the same disadvantages as B, (i.e.) logistics. Plans B-D, however, “might possibly be effected” if the French were allied with Britain and assumed the defence of the Dover Straits.³⁹ These ineffective appraisals of the 1907-08 war plans betrayed Beresford’s use of the planning issue to support his other charges against the Admiralty.

Rear-Admiral Custance’s testimony too, did not diminish the validity of the Fisher regime’s war plans. He thought the plans “curious” as they under-rated the German fleet, over-exaggerated British strength, and “made no real attempt” to deal with the principal objective of bringing the Germans to action. Plan A was “particularly faulty” in placing the northern cordon too far from the enemy and concentrating the main British fleet at the Humber where it was exposed to an attack from German destroyers. He himself had recommended a similar Home Fleet concentration at the Nore to counter sorties by a combined Russo-German fleet issuing into the North Sea in 1902.⁴⁰ His chief objection involved the cruiser cordons being under the Admiralty’s control while their supporting armoured cruisers were commanded by the C-in-C Channel: “a division of authority little calculated to success.” Believing, “plans prepared by a Committee are not only useless, but dangerous.”, Custance shared Fisher’s and Wilson’s attitude that, “The plan must be in the head of the officer who will conduct the war, and he must be a member of the Board.” His other complaints ridiculed Plan B’s Borkum proposal and the July 1908 War Orders (Plan W.1-W.2) as “really so confused to be unintelligible, and indicate the dangers we have been running from want of proper direction [Fisher/Admiralty].” Custance did not elaborate on these “dangers” nor

³⁹ Appendices to Proceedings.....August 12, 1909, Appendix 11. Criticisms by Lord Charles Beresford of Admiralty War Plans. Part 1., pp. 92-3, CAB 16/9B.

⁴⁰ Refer to Chapter Two, above.

criticise other designs such as Plans C, D, or W.3., indicating that he may have supported these proposals.

Custance's late 1907 campaign plan for the Channel/Home Fleets comprised Beresford's "Second Plan of Action" sent to the Admiralty in June 1908. His proposals, ironically, equated with the "unintelligible" provisions of Plan W.2. and Wilson's 1907 recommendations to keep heavy units out of the North Sea at the outset of war. Since, "it will not be possible at the opening of the war to keep a squadron inshore off the Elbe, Weser, and Ems, or to enter the Baltic", Custance thought the first option the "ultimate aim" with the second "advisable" only if the war was proving favourable to Britain. His plan mirrored Wilson's 1907 "Remarks" and W.2.'s proposal to base two British fleets on northern and southern English ports to cut off and engage the High Seas Fleet. The main fleet would be based at Queensferry while a cruiser-destroyer force was based at the Humber, Harwich, and the Medway. Patrolling a line from Spurn Point to the German/Danish frontier, fleet cruisers would watch for German movements and guard the Skagerrak. Operating south of the Spurn Point line, the cruiser/destroyer force would cover the southern portion of the North Sea. The main fleet would be "in such a position" that it could support British cruisers and engage the German fleet if it sortied but remain 200 miles from German ports during nightfall. Custance's objective was that the two forces act in mutual support: the southern force preventing German destroyers from moving north to attack the main fleet, the latter moving south to engage the High Seas Fleet should it sortie against the southern destroyers/cruisers.⁴¹

Although his plan paralleled aspects of Plans W.1./W.2., and Wilson's North Sea "sweeps", Custance thought the war plans "difficult to criticize, because it is hard to understand what is aimed at....". His critique of the July 1908 War Orders included the outgoing destroyer/cruiser dispositions near the Heligoland Bight and the small

⁴¹ Report and Proceedings of a Sub-Committee..., Eleventh meeting, June 8, 1909, Evidence of Admiral Sir Reginald Custance, Questions: 2353-55, p. 275, CAB 16/9A; C-in-C Channel Fleet to Admiralty, June 1, 1908. "Second Plan of Action for the British Fleet.", ADM 116/1037.

number of vessels allotted to Beresford for operations near these waters.⁴² Custance's inconsistent and contradictory appraisals reinforced Beresford's charges against the Admiralty but were not a serious analysis of the 1907-08 war plans.

During the Beresford Inquiry, the Admiralty received support from two sources intimately familiar with the Navy's plans: George Ballard and Sir A.K. Wilson. As the chief architect of the 1907 War Plans, Ballard sent Fisher a May 1909 paper detailing the history and development of the contingencies then under attack in the CID inquiry. His offer to defend the plans before the Committee was significant since as Captain of HMS *Hampshire* in the 1st Cruiser Squadron (1907-09) he had been under Beresford's overall command for the past three years.⁴³ Regarding the former's condemnations of Plan A, Ballard concluded:

It is evident that he entirely fails to grasp the main idea. These cruisers are not watching cruisers in any sense of the word as regards watching for the exit of the enemy's fleet, but placed solely to intercept trade. It would be quite unnecessary to set a close watch on either the Skaw or the Elbe, as it would not matter in the least which way the enemy came out. Our object is to force them to proceed to a distance of more than 300 miles from their own sheltered bases to defend their trade and then fall upon them when outside, or cut off their retreat. For the latter purpose the main battle fleet is placed in a commanding and safe central position.

Only if this plan failed, or if the government decided that a "more advanced and vigorous offensive" was necessary, would Plans B/C be implemented. Beresford's assumption that blocking the Elbe "was a bad policy for us to shut an enemy in" was also mistaken, for it ensured that the Germans would be forced to use one exit only to the North Sea.⁴⁴

⁴² Report and Proceedings of a Sub-Committee..., Twelfth meeting, June 15, 1909, Evidence of Admiral Sir Reginald Custance, Question 2390, p. 285, CAB 16/9A.

⁴³ G.A. Ballard, "Record of business, letters &c.", personal entries for August 20, 1907 and December 16, 1909. Ballard Papers, MS 80/200, Box 1., NMM. Also refer to the *Navy Lists*, August 1907 to January 1909, under HMS *Hampshire*.

⁴⁴ G.A. Ballard to Fisher, May 3, 1909, "Remarks on the Framing of Certain Plans for War....", pp. 4-7, ADM 1/8997.

Ballard demolished Beresford's critiques by tracing the 1907 designs back to the NID's North Sea studies initiated by Custance in 1902. Since the plans were predicated on "the known opinion of several officers of high standing (NID's War Division) and embodied the "result of much special attention", the final form of the 1907 plans were decided with the "concurrence of more than one practical expert" (i.e. Ballard, Hankey, Ottley, Slade). Critics such as Beresford and Custance, "differ quite as much among themselves, and can produce no alternative plan which is entitled to carry weight as representing the views of a majority of naval officers."--a reference to their inconsistent representations before the sub-committee. Ballard viewed Beresford's campaign plans as suspect, especially after the October 1907 Manoeuvres where the C-in-C had "placed his fleet in a position of perpetual danger for no adequate reason" and was nearly annihilated by Custance's destroyers.⁴⁵ Ballard's paper illustrated the inadequacies in the malcontent's criticisms and further validated the Admiralty's strategic designs, such as Plan A, as credible contingencies.

Wilson's June 24th testimony confirmed that he also endorsed the Fisher administration's strategic policy. A contributor to the Admiralty's planning throughout 1904-07, it was unlikely that Wilson would have supported Beresford's criticisms since his "Remarks on the War Plans" duplicated two of the Ballard Committee's scenarios.⁴⁶ Wilson agreed with Custance that it was neither "practicable" nor "desirable" for a committee to construct plans for the outbreak of war as secrecy was a serious problem. While, "He was perfectly certain that any plan drawn up in peace would not be carried out in war.", Wilson viewed the Admiralty plans as "extremely useful" if they were applied to appropriate conditions. Plans could also be tested in naval manoeuvres (which they had since 1888) and evaluated under conditions "much nearer the real thing than was possible in land work."⁴⁷ Cross-examined by Beresford, Wilson denied that

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-4, 7-10.

⁴⁶ Refer to Chapter Three above.

⁴⁷ Report and Proceedings of a Sub-Committee....thirteenth meeting, 24 June, 1909, Testimony of Admiral Sir Arthur K. Wilson, pp. 305-16, CAB 16/9A; Appendices to Proceedings of

Admiralty policy had resulted in a dearth of destroyers and small cruisers. His retort recapitulated his aversion to a close blockade strategy as outlined in his 1907 "Remarks": "my point is that, as I do not want to work over on the German coast, I do not want so many [cruisers/destroyers]."⁴⁸ Although Wilson would in two years advocate a close North Sea blockade, he regarded Beresford's insistence on more vessels, each to fulfill specific duties under a war plan, as virtually "impossible".⁴⁹ Other questions associated with the Fisher administration's strategic preparations did not, however, avoid serious circumspection by the "Beresford" sub-committee. The staff question attached to the war planning issue was the weakest link in Fisher's armour.

Allegations that the Admiralty lacked a proper staff apparatus had prompted Fisher to remove ambiguities in the existing planning organisation before the Inquiry. To shore up his position, Fisher consulted Corbett over a re-structuring of the Admiralty's "thinking" department.⁵⁰ During the Inquiry itself, Haldane supported Beresford's call for the establishment of a naval staff.⁵¹ This aspect of the controversy between Beresford and the Admiralty gained prominence when the Prime Minister queried Slade about alleged deficiencies within the Navy's planning/intelligence environs. Recently appointed as C-in-C East Indies (February-March), Slade's rejoinder to Asquith's questions criticised Fisher's use of *ad hoc* planning committees and the DNI's advisory position in strategic matters. His paper hinted that a formal staff system

a Sub-committee....Appendix 11, Admiral of the Fleet Sir A.K. Wilson's Remarks on War Plans., pp. 94-6, August 12, 1909, CAB 16/9B; Evidence of Sir Arthur Wilson on the scope of Naval Plans, ADM 1/8047, Admiralty. May 1908; *FDSF v.1.*, pp. 197-8.

⁴⁸ Report and Proceedings of a Sub-Committee....thirteenth meeting, 24 June, 1909, Question 2598, p. 314, CAB 16/9A. Refer also to: Questions 2529, 2539, 2540, 2554, 2601, and 2602., pp. 305-16.

⁴⁹ Appendices....Summary of Proceedings-Part III. War Plans and Intelligence, Appendix 48, August 12, 1909, CAB 16/9B.

⁵⁰ Fisher to Corbett, April 13, 1909, *FGDN v.2.*, pp. 243-4.

⁵¹ Report and Proceedings of a Sub-Committee....Proceedings of the 10th meeting of the Sub-Committee, July 13, 1909, CAB 16/9A; d'Ombrain, *War Machinery*, pp. 233-4.

with executive powers was needed, ideally through a conversion of the NID.⁵²

Before and during the Inquiry, the CID's Naval Assistant Secretary took the initiative to install a proper staff system at the Admiralty. In late November 1908, Hankey sent a staff outline to the War College President, Captain R.S. Lowry, believing that Lowry's position on the Strategy Committee might induce Fisher to accept the proposal. Although Fisher stated he would "give full consideration to it", Hankey heard nothing further.⁵³ In late May he broached the topic with McKenna in another paper, "The organisation of a General Staff", arguing that the CID's final report would be favourable if a "scheme" for a naval "General Staff" were forwarded. With McKenna's blessing Hankey informed Fisher that the basis of a staff already existed in the planning committees (Ballard and Strategy), the NID, and the War College. Hankey later stated "gradually I persuaded him" on the need for a staff, but what Fisher accepted was a greatly "emasculated" version of the original proposal.⁵⁴

Slade's successor as DNI, Rear-Admiral A.E. Bethell (1909-1912), had also drafted a staff proposal in mid-May. He shared Hankey's appreciation that an executive body was needed to coordinate war planning and that the Admiralty already possessed a "staff" in the First Sea Lord, the NID, and War College. Bethell's recommendation for a "Navy War Council" included: the First Sea Lord as President, the DNI as Vice-President, an "Assistant Director for War", the War College President (Rear-Admiral) and Captain, and the First Sea Lord's Naval Assistant. The head of the NID's War Division and the Commander of the War College would act as Joint Secretaries. The DNI should be given "executive powers" to streamline work and allow the NID to

⁵² Appendices to the Proceedings..., Appendix 36: 1. Telegram Sent to Rear-Admiral E.J.W. Slade, April 29, 1909. 2. Letter from Rear-Admiral E.J.W. Slade to Mr. Asquith in Reply to #1., May 8, 1909, CAB 16/9B.

⁵³ "Papers and Correspondence about a Naval War Staff", Lowry to Hankey, November 24, 27, 1908, HNKY 7/2, Hankey MSS, Churchill College, Cambridge.

⁵⁴ Hankey to McKenna, May 27, 1909, Fisher to Hankey, (n.d.), "Papers and Correspondence about a Naval War Staff", HNKY 7/2; Hankey, *The Supreme Command v.1.*, pp. 72-4; Roskill, *Hankey*, p. 99.

circumvent “M” Branch (Secretariat) and present its submissions directly to the Board. Strategic questions would be discussed by the Council with problems worked out at the War College and the War Division retaining its role as a planning department. Once completed, the Council would review and approve all war plans.⁵⁵ Bethell’s recommendations, however, were not implemented. Fisher accepted his and Hankey’s suggestions in-so-far as they aided the Admiralty’s case before the CID, not because he truly desired a staff system with executive powers. McKenna presented Hankey’s revised May draft, “in a somewhat diluted form” to the “Beresford” sub-committee.⁵⁶

The Beresford Inquiry’s final report, 12th August 1909, recognised McKenna’s watered-down version of Hankey’s (and Bethell’s) staff proposal as part of the Admiralty’s ongoing development of its strategical side.⁵⁷ Defects in the planning organisation had not escaped notice. Beresford’s accusations and Slade’s testimony influenced the sub-committee to urge the creation of a naval staff as soon as possible.

Although some progress has been made, the measures which have been taken hitherto are open to a good deal of criticism, and the Committee may probably consider it vitally important that steps should be taken without delay to complete the organisation of a great naval War Staff.⁵⁸

Fisher remained as defiant as ever. Reproaching the CID’s findings in a 28th August letter to Esher, he defended his accomplishments and admonished the “cowards” on the Defence Committee for:

II. The *suggestio falsi* that the Admiralty had been wanting in strategical thought-whereas we had effected the immense advantage of establishing the

⁵⁵ “Proposals by Director of Naval Intelligence for carrying out the duties of a General Staff and re-organisation of the Naval Intelligence Department”, Admiralty. Naval War Staff., May 15, 1909, ADM 1/ 8047, Admiralty, May 1908.

⁵⁶ Hankey, *Supreme Command v. 1.*, pp. 74-5

⁵⁷ Report and Proceedings of a Sub-Committee....Tenth meeting, May 15, 1909, Testimony of First Lord, Reginald McKenna, Questions: 2192-7, 2200-01, CAB 16/9A; Appendices to Proceedings....Appendix 48, Summary of Proceedings. Part III. War Plans and Intelligence, CAB16/9B.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, Appendix 48., p. 245.

Naval War College and gave the evidence of practical strategy in effecting the concentration of our Fleets instead of the previous state of dispersion. No redistribution of strategical force since the days of Noah!⁵⁹

While the war plans proved that the Admiralty's strategic policy was not deficient, the War College and fleet re-concentration could not compensate for the lack of a staff although one had always existed within the NID. The CID's final report, and indeed the entire Inquiry, had undermined Fisher's position in not recognising the Admiralty's ultimate authority over a truculent subordinate. Lacking Cabinet support, Fisher had little choice but to acquiesce in the CID's judgement that a "great naval Staff" be erected at the Admiralty.

Since the CID's final report did not recommended the new staff's structure nor its relationship to the Admiralty, the outgoing Fisher had considerable leeway in its constitution. As he intimated to McKenna, there would be no executive powers accorded the staff: "The point to guard against is a Board within a Board, and no diminishing of the direct personal responsibility to the First Lord or First Sea Lord."⁶⁰ Borrowing the title coined by Bethell, the new "Navy War Council" was announced on 11th October 1909. It retained the system established with the Ballard Committee in 1906: a planning branch bereft of executive authority and solely responsible to the Service chief and not the Board as advocated by Slade, Hankey, and Bethell. The Council's duties were vaguely defined as "the study of strategy and the consideration and working out of war plans." Its structure was similar to Bethell's outline, including: the First Sea Lord as President, the Admiralty's Assistant Secretary as Council Secretary, the DNI, and the Director of the new Naval Mobilisation Department (DMD). Not a "regular" member, the War College President attended when business required his presence. Should the First Sea Lord be absent, the Presidency was assumed by the Second Sea Lord or any Sea Lord fulfilling the former's duties. All "executive powers"

⁵⁹ Fisher to Esher, August 28, 1909, *FGDN* v.2., pp. 260-1. Also refer to: Fisher to Ottley, August 29th, p. 263.

⁶⁰ Fisher to Esher, October 9, 1909, *FGDN* v.2., p. 270.

remained in the hands of the Service chief.⁶¹ With its initiative centred in the First Sea Lord, the Council was a stop-gap solution to placate the CID's call for a naval staff, "a sop to the critics and the politicians rather than a genuine attempt to solve the problem."⁶² Like its predecessors, the Ballard and Strategy Committees, the Council was merely another advisory body serving the dictates of the Service head.

Fisher's Navy War Council toppled the Intelligence Department from its position as the Navy's principal planning centre when war plans and mobilisation were transferred to the new DMD. This body was formed after the Beresford Inquiry to ease the strain on the overworked NID. The real reason for this upheaval occurred because the heads of the NID's War and Trade Divisions, Captains Henry Campbell and A.R. Hulbert, had supplied Beresford with information to aid his case against the Admiralty. Following the Inquiry, Campbell and Hulbert were sacked, the Trade Division abolished, and the War Division hacked away from the NID and merged with the Mobilisation Department.⁶³ The effect of this "reorganisation" was alluded to in the Naval Staff's historical monograph:

The new organisation left the Intelligence Department reduced in prestige and shorn of half its strength. It reverted more or less to the position it had held previous to 1887 when it was confined to the collection and collation of intelligence. This was a change of profound significance, for it meant that there was no longer a single head to collate the work of the divisions for the consideration of the First Sea Lord. The Director of Naval Intelligence was no longer in a position to discuss and consider plans of war....so that in the year 1909 brought with it a great change in the status of the Intelligence Department and it is not possible to regard it after that year as the equivalent of a Naval Staff.⁶⁴

Under the First Sea Lord's continued overlordship, the War Council was bereft of the

⁶¹ "A Navy War Staff, Part 1.", February 18, 1910 and "Navy War Council", October 12, 1909, *The Times*. *FDSF* v.1., pp. 247-8.

⁶² Haggie, "War Planning", p. 128.

⁶³ *FDSF* v.1., pp. 201-2.

⁶⁴ *Naval Staff*. Chapter X, pp. 48-9, NLMD.

established and experienced system of strategic planning developed within NID from 1887 to 1909--a network responsible for the Admiralty's operational contingencies during the entire period. Even Fisher's *ad hoc* 1906-08 planning committees had, at their epicentre, competent and talented officers from the War Division such as Ballard and Hankey. While Esher stated that the system was "all right while you have a Fisher there,"⁶⁵ this was not the case after 1909.

That the Navy War Council was never intended to serve as a planning staff was apparent shortly after its establishment. As evidenced from its official minutes, the Council only met 14 times in its 29 months of existence, October 1909-March 1912. During Fisher's last three months it met only four times, while his successor, Wilson, convened the organisation a mere seven times during his two year term of office. Moreover, there is no evidence that discussion, and or work, on war planning ever took place.⁶⁶ *The Times* Naval Correspondent, J.R. Thursfield viewed the body as "a very important step towards the evolution of a fully organised Naval War Staff; but.... it is no redemption in full of the pledges given in that regard by the Admiralty to the Beresford Committee."⁶⁷ Divorced from Fisher's policies, his former Naval Assistant, Herbert Richmond, condemned the War Council as "an absurd anomaly" and "the most absurd bit of humbug that has been produced for a long time.", which:

pretends to be the basis of a General Staff, but its constitution shews that whoever devised it has no idea of what a staff is wanted for, or the particular functions of such a body....The study of war forms no part of its work. The 1st Sea Lord remains supreme & imposes his crude strategical ideas on the nation.⁶⁸

The Navy War Council's creation and the NID's demise as a planning department were the final acts in Fisher's retrenchment of the Service chief's hegemony over strategic

⁶⁵ Esher to M.V. Brett, March 12, 1909, *Esher v.2.*, p. 374.

⁶⁶ Navy War Council Minutes, 13 October, 1909 to 5 March, 1912, ADM 116/3090, Case 0023.

⁶⁷ "A Naval War Staff, Part 1.", *The Times*, February 18, 1910.

⁶⁸ Richmond Diary, October 27, 1909, RIC/1/8, Richmond Papers, NMM.

policy; a move that had reached its apogee during the “Military Needs” sub-committee. It proved a harbinger for the decline of coherent naval planning into the First World War.

IV.

The Navy War Council was one aspect of Fisher’s agenda to secure a policy legacy. His last goal was to install a successor who would continue his *matériel* and personnel reforms and the strategic policy developed over the previous five years. Throughout late October-early November 1909, Fisher and McKenna worked to assure Wilson’s ascension as the next First Sea Lord. Wilson was one of the few officers with the requisite seniority and respect to have avoided the partisanship which had spilt the upper Service ranks. McKenna promoted the Admiral as an acceptable compromise candidate who could heal the rift caused by the Fisher-Beresford feud.⁶⁹ In all likelihood, he was meant as an interim replacement until a more suitable nominee, such as Prince Louis Battenberg, emerged.⁷⁰ The promotion of “Ard Art” also circumvented any political changes which might halt Fisher’s legacy. In late November 1909, Asquith dissolved Parliament in preparation for a General Election in the new year. If the Conservatives won, a member of the Beresford clique might have become First Sea Lord. Five of the eligible admirals on the active list were “Syndicate of Discontent” members. Even if the Liberals retained power, there was no guarantee Asquith would not oust McKenna and appoint a new First Lord inclined towards the Beresfordians.⁷¹ It was essential for Fisher that Wilson be confirmed post-haste.⁷²

⁶⁹ Bradford, *Wilson*, pp. 223-4; *FDSF* v.1., pp. 204-5, 211-2; Williams, *Defending the Empire*, pp. 127-37.

⁷⁰ Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, p 202-3, based on Fisher to Pamela McKenna, December 10, 1909 and Fisher to Reginald McKenna, February 23, 1911 in *FGDN* v.2., pp. 344, 356.

⁷¹ Fisher to McKenna, December 17, 1909, *FGDN* v.2., p. 284. N. Lambert, “Admiral Sir Arthur Knyvett Wilson, V.C. (1910-1911)” in Malcolm Murfett (ed), *The First Sea Lords: From Fisher to Mountbatten* (Westport, 1994), pp. 35-7. The five Syndicate admirals were: Beresford, Custance, Lewis Beaumont, Sir Arthur Moore, and Ashton Curzon-Howe. Two of the five, Beaumont (1894-99) and Custance (1899-1902), had been DNI.

⁷² Fisher to Frederick Ponsonby [Viscount Knollys], November 3, 1909, *FGDN* v.2., p. 276.

Reluctant to leave the Admiralty, he wanted Wilson as First Sea Lord for at least two years to preserve his reforms and as a “stonewall” to his opponents.⁷³

Wilson was selected because he was the best guarantor of Fisher’s reform policies. He has been linked to the so-called “*matériel school*” and supported Fisher’s controversial capital ship program.⁷⁴ In mid November 1909, Wilson reassured McKenna that he would maintain the Admiralty’s policy of dreadnought construction.⁷⁵ By-and-large, he adhered to the existing strategic policy. Wilson may have been at “variance” with details of the Admiralty war plans, but this does not prove that his strategic views were fundamentally different from Fisher’s.⁷⁶ Wilson was an active participant in offensive planning throughout 1905-08 and had endorsed the principal Admiralty contingencies against Germany during the “Beresford Inquiry”. He shared Fisher’s attitude on the First Sea Lord being the sole director of all strategic planning. A month before his retirement, Fisher intimated that only he and Wilson knew what the Navy’s actual war plans were and that the policy would continue:

We [Fisher/Wilson] have talked a lot about our War Plan for the Navy. You know he told the Defence Committee that only he and I knew of the War Plan, which is quite true, and it was the same when his Fleet was joined up with mine when South African War [was] in progress. He would sooner die than disclose it. I suggest you to withhold your judgement.⁷⁷

By December, Wilson was in charge at the Admiralty and was irritating the other Sea Lords and McKenna with his obstinacy, secretiveness, and uncompromising

⁷³ Fisher to McKenna, November 8, 1909, *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁷⁴ Lambert, “Sir Arthur Kvyvett Wilson”, in Murfett (ed), *The First Sea Lords*, p. 36; *FGDN* v. 1., pp. 68, 213, 401; *FGDN* v.2., pp 264-6.

⁷⁵ Fisher to Arnold White, November 13, 1909, *FGDN* v.2., p. 277.

⁷⁶ Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, p. 203. The questionable assertion that Wilson’s strategic inclinations did not “mirror” Fisher’s will be examined in the next chapter.

⁷⁷ Fisher to Esher, December 25, 1909, *FGDN* v.2., p. 286.

attitude.⁷⁸ The reins had passed to the one officer who consistently shared Fisher's belief that secrecy and prerogative should dictate the Service chief's approach to strategy and planning--a view entrenched by the challenges presented to the Admiralty's strategic policy throughout 1909. As Fisher stated in *Memories*, "Only Sir Arthur Wilson and myself, when I was First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, knew the Naval plan of war."⁷⁹ Accordingly, when Fisher's retirement and Wilson's succession became official on 25th January 1910, the Service chief's ultimate authority over the Navy's strategic policy was re-established.⁸⁰ This reaffirmation, Wilson's personality, and the demise of NID-based war planning, ensured that the Admiralty's strategic policy appeared directionless and disorganized going into the First World War.

⁷⁸ Sir Francis Bridgeman to Fisher, November 21, 1909, *Ibid.*, pp 282-3; *FDSF v.1.*, p. 213; Lord Esher to M.V. Brett, January 4, 1910, *Esher v. 2.*, p. 433.

⁷⁹ Fisher, *Memories*, p. 102.

⁸⁰ *FGDN v.1.*, p. 205; *The Times*, December 2, 1909, p. 12a.

Chapter 6: The Solidification of Dual Strategies, 1911-1914.

I.

Admiral of the Fleet Sir A.K. Wilson's tenure as First Sea Lord (January 1910-December 1911) contributed little to the Admiralty's strategic policy compared to earlier administrations. The Navy's chaotic planning after 1910, however, was also attributable to Fisher's final actions as First Sea Lord. A proven planning system centred on the NID, was terminated by his policies after the "Beresford" Inquiry. The Navy War Council firmly re-trenched the Service chief's prerogatives over all Admiralty planning. Yet, neither Fisher nor McKenna could have foreseen the new Service head's autocratic approach in policy matters when they assured his ascension in 1910. Under Wilson, the Admiralty's strategy reflected his preferences from 1905-09, including designs earlier condemned by the Ballard Committee and Wilson himself for North Sea close blockade and inshore operations. While Fisher and Wilson's strategic views were similar, the latter's adoption of these questionable proposals disrupted the consistency of naval war planning leading into the First World War.

Lacking Fisher's political aptitude, Wilson could not combat further probes into naval policy by the Cabinet, Army, and CID. As a result, defects in the Navy's war plans were revealed at the 23rd August 1911 CID meeting over the Agadir Crisis. Wilson's poor performance before this caucus led to: the Army's "continental" plan gaining wider acceptance, Churchill's replacing McKenna as First Lord, the institution of a so-called Naval War Staff, and Wilson's removal. This fallout, however, was more a rejection of Wilson's strategic policy than a censure of all planning developed since the 1890's.

After Agadir, contentious aspects of the Wilson regime's plans were openly challenged. Home Fleet C-in-C's, Admirals Sir Francis Bridgeman and Sir George Callaghan, condemned proposals for a close North Sea blockade. Responding to the C-in-C's concerns, the War Staff advocated an equally unworkable "Intermediate" mid-North Sea blockade. There is evidence that as a remedy to this system the Admiralty

accepted the distant (economic) blockade strategy, codified in Plan A/A1 (1907), as early as November-December 1912.¹ Others have overlooked this development, especially the roles played by George Ballard and Lieutenant K.G.B. Dewar in resurrecting and legitimising this plan.² Yet even as this strategy was reconfirmed at the eleventh hour in 1914, questionable contingencies from the Fisher period were reanimated by Churchill. Those familiar with these inshore/amphibious proposals rejected their revival due to strengthened German North Sea defences and a misinterpretation of the original plans by Churchill and his obscure planning group established in 1913. When the war began, the Royal Navy's strategic policy was split between two divergent options: offensive inshore operations discredited by the 1906-08 Admiralty planners and the 1907 distant blockade, resuscitated in 1912-1914.

Historians have condemned the Admiralty's 1910-14 planning as hopelessly outdated in light of German submarine and flotilla capabilities in the North Sea. Others have claimed that Fisher and Wilson did not share the same strategic views on North Sea operations--a questionable point given Fisher's correspondence and his well-known penchant for a Baltic campaign.³ It is important to realise that the Wilson-Churchill schemes were never to be implemented under the original blueprints for the 1907-08 war plans. In fact, the close blockade and amphibious scenarios were those most deprecated by the Ballard and Strategy Committee planners.⁴ The principal options from those series were either a distant blockade as adopted in 1912 or a Baltic push aimed at German trade. Independently, the North Sea operations promoted by the First Lord and First Sea Lord were valueless as former planners such as the DOD (Director Operations

¹ Admiralty to C-in-C Home Fleets, "War Plans and War Orders", November 25, December 16, 1912 and February 18, 1913. ADM 116/3412. War Plans and War Orders Home Fleet and Detached Squadrons. November 1912-December 1913.

² See: *FDSF v. I.*; Mackay, *Fisher*; Lambert, *Naval Revolution*; Haggie, "War Planning in the Fisher Era"; Hayes, "Admiralty's Plans".

³ Hayes, "Admiralty's Plans", pp. 95-116; Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, pp. 203-5.

⁴ Refer to Chapters Three and Four.

Division, Naval War Staff), Ballard, realised in 1913-14. The Admiralty's tortuous strategic policy before August 1914 was the result of a fractured planning system. Wilson's autocracy, and opposition to his and Churchill's strategic designs.

II.

Verdicts on Wilson's capabilities as First Sea Lord are not flattering. Inarticulate and secretive, he lacked Fisher's Machiavellian flair when defending the Admiralty's case before the politicians. This was evident at the CID where his opposition to the Army's "continental" strategy tarnished the Admiralty's competence before the Cabinet. Throughout 1911, McKenna desperately appealed to Fisher to return to England and take over Wilson's brief when the Admiralty's case went before the CID.⁵ Maintaining Fisher's *matériel* policies, Wilson exercised a harsher despotism in administrative and strategic matters. Senior officers, including the other Sea Lords, found it impossible to work with and under the First Sea Lord because of his rigid formality, obstinance, and authoritarianism.⁶ The Second Sea Lord (soon Home Fleet C-in-C), Vice-Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman, who had served under Wilson in the Channel Fleet, warned Fisher in November 1909: "I know from experience with him that there is no joy to be found in serving either with him or under him! Deadly dull and uncompromising as you know! He will never consult with anyone and is impatient in argument, even to being impossible."⁷ After Wilson's appointment, Bridgeman was proven correct for he was treated "as if he were a second lieutenant on board a ship.", in matters of Board policy and personnel administration.⁸

The First Lord, too, was disenchanted with Wilson's overall attitude. McKenna

⁵ N. Lambert, "Admiral Sir Arthur Knyvett-Wilson, V.C. (1910-1911), in Murfett, *First Sea Lords*, p. 38; Fisher to Mrs. Cecil Fisher, December 2, 1910, Fisher to Esher, October 11, 1911, *FGDN* v.2., pp. 417, 390; d' Ombrain, *War Machinery*, pp. 239, 242, 250-1; Mackay, p. 424.

⁶ Lambert, "Wilson" in *First Sea Lords*, p. 39.

⁷ Bridgeman to Fisher, November 21, 1909, *FGDN* v.2., p.282.

⁸ Esher to Brett, January 4, 1910, *Esher* v.2., p. 433; *FDSF* v.1., pp. 213-4.

hoped for Wilson's retirement and frequently discussed his supersession with Fisher.⁹ Wilson's intractability dictated his conduct of the strategic realm. His approach to war planning was revealed before the Beresford Inquiry where he had complained that the secrecy of war plans was compromised once they were communicated to the C-in-C's afloat.¹⁰ Consequently, Wilson distrusted planning bodies and a staff system, preferring to keep strategic contingencies safely, "locked in the brain of the First Sea Lord" and no where else.¹¹ Evidenced by the Navy War Council minutes, no in depth study of planning/strategic issues occurred under Wilson's presidency.¹² Because Wilson relied exclusively on his own council, the Admiralty's strategic course became increasingly convoluted during this period.

Before August 1911, it is difficult to chart the Admiralty's strategic planning. Along with Wilson's secretiveness, plans had to conform to the Declaration of London's provisions for the blockade of an enemy's ports. When the House of Lords rejected the agreement in December 1911, major changes were apparently made to the war plans. Since the documents outlining these changes and Wilson's plans are missing from the Admiralty records, it is difficult to define the true nature of the Navy's contingencies from January 1910 to August 1911.¹³ When Wilson departed in December

⁹ Fisher to Ottley, February 25, 1910, Fisher MSS, FISR 1/9, #474, Churchill College, Cambridge; Fisher to McKenna, February 23, 1910, Fisher to Jellicoe, May 9, 1911, Fisher to McKenna, July 12, 1911, Fisher to Reginald Henderson, September 29, 1911, Fisher to Arnold White, October 1, 1911, *FGDN* v.2., pp. 356, 369, 377, 386, 387.

¹⁰ Report and Proceedings of a Sub-committee.... by Lord Charles Beresford, Thirteenth meeting, 24 June 1909, Testimony of Admiral Sir A.K. Wilson, pp. 305-16, CAB 16/9A; Appendices to Proceeding of a Sub-committee...., Appendix 11, Admiral Sir A.K. Wilson's Remarks on War Plans, pp. 94-6, 12 August, 1909, CAB 16/9B.

¹¹ Fisher to Esher, December 25, 1909, *FGDN* v.2., p. 286. ; *FDSF* v.1., p. 247.

¹² Navy War Council minutes, 13 October, 1909 to 5 March, 1911, ADM 116/3090, Case 0023., PRO.

¹³ The only Admiralty documents pertaining to the Declaration of London are ADM1/8400/397 and ADM116/1233-35 which cover the 1914-1916 period. Cabinet papers on the Declaration under CAB 17/87, CAB 41/33/19, CAB 37/105-107 give no indication of what changes were to be made to the Admiralty's war plans. There are likewise no hints of how the Declaration affected Admiralty planning in the Navy War Council minutes for 1910-1911.

1911, the Admiralty still had not sent the C-in-C Home Fleet, Admiral Bridgeman, copies of its new war plan against Germany.¹⁴ Wilson's sudden support for a close North Sea blockade in 1911, contradicting his earlier views, is also open to conjecture due to the disappearance of his personal papers and diary.¹⁵ Given these discrepancies, allegations that Wilson's strategic views were "fundamentally different" from Fisher's are not that straight forward. His adoption of a close blockade may have contrasted Fisher's alleged "flotilla defence" strategy, but there is insufficient evidence to conclusively state that the two men were at opposite ends of the strategic spectrum.¹⁶ Fisher stated that he and Wilson were at "variance" over details of the Admiralty's plans,¹⁷ yet Wilson's contribution to planning throughout 1905-07, the similarities between his 1907 "Remarks" and War Plans A and C, Fisher's correspondence linking Wilson with his strategic program, and Wilson's support for the 1907-08 war plans during the Beresford Inquiry, indicate that they agreed on the Admiralty's strategy against Germany.¹⁸ Moreover, Fisher never condemned a close observational blockade of the Heligoland Bight as later adopted by Wilson in either his October 1908 "Submarine" paper or his December 1908 war plans "Commentary. If anything, the "Commentary" validated Plans W.1. and W.2 which mirrored Wilson's 1907 proposals for a cruiser/flotilla North Sea observational blockade.¹⁹

Evidence confirms that a close or observational North Sea blockade was projected by the Wilson Admiralty in March 1910. Correspondence from the outgoing Home Fleet C-in-C, Admiral Sir William May to his successor, Bridgeman (his second

¹⁴ Docket, "Addenda to Preliminary War Orders", Minutes by Flint (Head "M" Branch) and Minute by DNM, Duff, December 11, 1911, ADM 1/8132, Admiralty 1910, 29 November-December; Lambert, "Wilson" in Murfett, p. 44-5.

¹⁵ Bradford, *Wilson*, p. viii.; Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, p. 207.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 204-7.

¹⁷ Fisher to Grey and Fisher to Tweedmouth, January 23, 1908, *FGDN* v.2., pp. 155-7.

¹⁸ Refer to Chapters Two and Three above.

¹⁹ Refer to Chapter Four above.

stint as C-in-C), in March 1911 contained war orders and related communications between the Admiralty and Home Fleet from February 1909 to December 1910. The actual orders/plans are missing, but an index of the packet's contents indicates that the Admiralty's strategy closely matched the outlines of War Plans W.2.-W.3., Part 1, from 1908. On 14th March, 1910, Commodore (T), E. Charlton, sent the Admiralty a paper on the "German coast blockade". This was followed by a late August memorandum from May on the "Impracticability of Advanced bases". Given the subject of the Home Fleet-Admiralty correspondence, the contents of the C-in-C's war orders entailed an observational blockade of the German North Sea littoral and seizure of advanced flotilla bases as detailed in War Plans B-C (1907) and W.2. (1908). Responding to May's critiques, the Admiralty abolished the advanced base orders in October 1910. Sometime between October and early December, fresh War Orders for a Heligoland Bight "watch" were passed to the Home Fleet C-in-C who, along with Charlton, responded on 10th December.²⁰ The contents of the orders conformed to Plan W.3., Part 1.'s parameters for an observational blockade of the Bight by cruiser cordons on a line from the Terschelling to the Horn's Reef Light Vessel.²¹ Between March and December 1910, the Admiralty's strategy was modified from a close watch on the German coast to a more distant observational blockade of the Bight as detailed in the 1908 War Plans. Based on Plans B-C and Wilson's 1907 "Remarks", the "watch" on the Bight remained the Admiralty's strategy for the remainder of Wilson's term.

Combined Home-Atlantic Fleet exercises in April-May 1910 to test East Coast defensive patrols ("flotilla defence"), indirectly simulated observational patrols off an enemy's coast.²² One scenario simulated *Red* (Home) destroyer flotillas (*River* Class),

²⁰ "Secret, Received from Admiral Sir William May by Admiral Sir F.C.B. Bridgeman, March 25, 1911, Sections III and IV, Contents," May MSS, MAY/10, Tactical Reports, 1908-1913, NMM.

²¹ Refer to Chapter Four above.

²² C-in-C Home Fleet to Admiralty, "Report of the work carried out during the combined cruise with the Atlantic Fleet, April-May 1910.", 13th May, 1910, ADM 1/8119, From Admirals "X" Home Fleet, 1910.

supported by cruisers and *Scouts*, on Coast Patrol off the Firth of Forth. A coordinated attack on *Red's* patrol lines by *Blue* (Atlantic) flotillas (*Rivers* and *Tribals*), light cruisers, and *Scouts* resulted in the entire *Red* force being: "ruled out of action." The C-in-C Home Fleet concluded: "The scattered patrol [line] appears to me the weakest form of defence. It is attacked in detail and cannot get the help of its reserves." Hardly a shining example of "flotilla defence" at work, the exercise could have equally simulated British flotillas and "parent vessels" on close observational duties off the German North Sea estuaries given the composition of the forces involved: (i.e.) *Boadicea* Class light cruisers, *Scouts*, and *River/Tribal* Class destroyers.²³ The dispositions in the May 1910 exercise were identical to those from the 1907-08 manoeuvres, and earlier, conducted to test aspects of the Admiralty's offensive designs.²⁴

III.

Wilson's strategy was revealed during the 114th CID meeting at the height of the Agadir Crisis. Details of the 23rd August 1911 meeting, the DMO/General Staff exposition of their "continental" strategy to support France, and the belief that Wilson "botched" the Navy's case have been recounted elsewhere.²⁵ The Navy was under adverse scrutiny before the meeting due to the Admiralty's lax preparations in the early stages of the crisis.²⁶ The War Secretary, Richard Haldane, took advantage of favourable circumstances such as Fisher's resignation and Wilson's political liabilities

²³ Report by C-in-C Home Fleet, William H. May, 13th May 1910, *Ibid*.

²⁴ Refer to Chapters Three and Four above.

²⁵ Williamson, pp. 187-94; Hankey, *Supreme Command v. I.*, pp. 78-84; N. d'Ombraïn, "The Imperial General Staff and the Military Policy of a 'Continental Strategy' during the 1911 International Crisis", *Military Affairs*, October 1970, pp. 88-93; J. P. Macintosh, "The Role of the Committee of Imperial Defence before 1914", *The English Historical Review*, Volume LXXVII, 1962, pp. 189-91; Steiner, pp. 71-8, 200-02; Summerton, "British Military Planning", Chapter 8, pp. 431-81.

²⁶ Williamson, pp. 182-3; *FDSF v. I.*, pp. 241-4; Churchill, *World Crisis v. I.*, pp. 45-9.

to get the meeting on his own terms.²⁷ Haldane deliberately instigated the meeting to undermine the Admiralty's position within the CID. His motives involved a strengthening of the military entente with France and the creation of a defence ministry headed by the War Office. Aside from Wilson, McKenna, Hankey, and Bethell (DNI), the assembly constituted a strong gathering of the entente faction. Lord Esher and other regular Committee members who may have been inclined towards the Admiralty's strategy were purposely excluded from the debate.²⁸ Along with Wilson's political ineptitude, this explains why the Navy was preordained to give a poor performance in the last major prewar discussion on Britain's national strategy--a view still generally held by most historians. A reconsideration of the meeting's minutes and the motives behind Wilson's strategy indicates, however, that the Admiralty's case has been misrepresented.

Wilson repeated Fisher's stance during the "Military Needs" and "Beresford" inquiries when responding to the DMO, Brig.- General Henry Wilson's, proposal to despatch an expeditionary force to France. Pressed by Haldane whether the Admiralty would cover the BEF's transport across the Channel, Wilson stated that the Navy could perform the service "without serious difficulty." Yet before his presentation he reversed his position, critiquing the Army's plan for leaving Britain open to small raids and removing troops for amphibious operations. The Admiralty's strategic policy entailed an observational blockade on the German North Sea coast, especially the Ems, Weser, and Elbe estuaries. Owing to the Kiel Canal, it was necessary to watch the Baltic entrances--the outlines of these operations conforming to Plans B/C and W.1-W.3., Part 1. Although, "We had no wish to prevent the German Fleet from coming out", it was the egress of German destroyers and submarines into the North Sea that Wilson saw as

²⁷ J. W. Coogan, *The End of Neutrality: the United States, Britain, and Maritime Rights, 1887-1915*, (London, 1981), pp. 140-3.

²⁸ d'Ombrain, *War Machinery*, pp. 100-02.

“essential to prevent.”²⁹ This scenario apparently influenced his sudden support for a “close” blockade³⁰-- a strategy condemned in his 1907 “Remarks”. While it has been claimed that Wilson advocated this “close” blockade due to destroyer shortages for either a “flotilla” strategy or an observational blockade³¹, he alluded to the latter scenario: “If possible we should maintain our watch upon the German coastline with destroyers.” This repeated the observational blockade detailed in Plans C and W.1.-W.3, Part 1, with British destroyer flotillas supported by *Scouts* and light cruisers. Operations to seize Wangeroog at the mouth of the Jade and Shillinghorn were also projected. If necessary, both islands could serve as advanced bases for British flotillas, though Wilson later viewed the Shillinghorn operation as unessential.³² Amphibious landings at the Weser’s entrance and Bösüm to threaten the Kiel Canal were other options. Covered by the Fleet, these landings could detain at least ten German divisions while only employing one British division and Royal Marines. These operations would draw German formations from the main battles in France and might lead to the eventual destruction/expulsion of the High Seas Fleet if it were at Wilhelmshaven.³³

Recapitulating themes from 1905-09, Wilson advocated the seizure of Heligoland, an operation earlier decried by the Ballard Committee. Royal Marines would capture Heligoland “as soon as possible” after the outbreak of war --a scenario detailed in Hankey’s 1904 “Advanced Bases for the Fleet” and Plan B from 1907. While not anticipating “any difficulty”, regular troops should be spared to alleviate the “very arduous” blockade caused by German torpedo craft utilising the North Sea coastline. Cross-examined by the Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, and the CIGS,

²⁹ Committee of Imperial Defence. Minutes of the 114th meeting, August 23, 1911, CAB 2/2, pp. 10-11.

³⁰ Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, pp. 205-9.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

³² Minutes of the 114th Meeting, CAB 2/2, p. 11, 14.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

Field-Marshal Nicholson, Wilson elaborated on points already covered. Despite Churchill's doubts and Nicholson's view that amphibious landings "were doomed to failure", Wilson pressed on. Provided that the North Sea operations led to a successful fleet engagement, the Baltic could be entered and the Prussian coast blockaded. Advanced bases such as Fehmarn Island would have to be established to support the Fleet. Attacks on Swinemünde and Danzig were possibilities but, as realised throughout 1905-08, ultimately contingent on Denmark's attitude.³⁴

After Churchill's queries about the necessity of a blockade and Nicholson's observation that the Heligoland enterprise was "madness", Wilson again gave the reason for this strategy. An observational blockade would prevent German destroyer attacks on the Fleet. Any other policy was unacceptable as: "The safety of our Fleet depended upon preventing the German destroyers from getting out", and involved an increased British destroyer complement.³⁵ His belief that submarines could be contained in coastal waters by light forces originated in 1904 exercises between the Channel Fleet and submarines.³⁶ Wilson's reference to the German destroyer/submarine threat during the Agadir caucus was the primary motivation for the adoption of the "close" North Sea blockade in 1910-11.³⁷ It was not, however, a fundamental split with Fisher's views for Wilson's plans retained the same themes promulgated throughout 1904-09: observational, inshore, and amphibious operations off the German North Sea estuaries as precursors to a fleet action and a Baltic campaign aimed at Germany's vitals. His refusal to cooperate with the "continental" strategy and the demand for troops for amphibious projects indicated that he still adhered to the Fisher regime's strategic policy.³⁸

³⁴ Minutes of the 114th meeting of the CID, August 23, 1911, CAB 2/2, pp. 12-13.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 14.

³⁶ Lambert, "Wilson" in *First Sea Lords*, pp. 42-4.

³⁷ Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, pp. 205-11.

³⁸ Minutes of the 114th Meeting..., CAB 2/2, pp.14-15.

The Service chief's shortcomings during the 23rd August meeting fostered the belief that the Admiralty lacked credible war plans. Even the vacillating Prime Minister admitted that the Navy's strategy was "puerile" and "wholly impracticable".³⁹ Admiralty supporters such as Hankey were dismayed by Wilson's presentation. The CID Naval Secretary believed the Admiral's discourse, "savoured rather of having been 'cooked up' in the dinner hour."⁴⁰ Historians have focussed, perhaps unnecessarily, on Wilson's CID performance as proof that the Admiralty's plans were amateurish compared to the Army's equally controversial "continental" strategy.⁴¹ While the First Sea Lord was out of his depth before the Committee, insinuations that the Admiralty's strategic policy was inept are unwarranted. At best, his proposals conformed to Plans W.1.-W. 3, Part 1., for an observational North Sea blockade with flotillas and their supports lying off the German estuaries during the day. These plans were, in fact, meant to keep the enemy's coast under observation but removed British capital ships from the threat posed by German torpedo craft.⁴² Moreover, the meeting's minutes reveal that critiques of the DMO's plan by Churchill, Wilson, and McKenna, were no less scathing or damaging than those directed at the Admiralty. At several junctures, the Home Secretary bested General Wilson on questions pertaining to British military action in the event of a retreat from the Meuse and the BEF being placed under French command.⁴³

Wilson, however, diverged from Fisher's script during the "Military Needs" and "Beresford" sub-committees to "hush up" on strategic matters and revealed the Admiralty's offensive planning to the CID. The point was not lost on Hankey who

³⁹ Williamson, p. 193.

⁴⁰ Hankey, *Supreme Command* v.1., p. 81.

⁴¹ Williamson, pp. 191-3; d' Ombrain, *War Machinery*, pp. 101-02; Summerton, 443-71; Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, pp. 204-07.

⁴² See above, footnotes 29-32 and Chapter Four.

⁴³ Minutes of the 114th Meeting...., CAB 2/2, pp. 6-10.

confided to Fisher, “He [Wilson] allowed himself to be drawn too much about his naval intentions, a subject on which you always declined to be drawn.”⁴⁴ Fisher was “astounded” and “really upset” with Wilson when he discovered the extent of the revelations before the Committee.⁴⁵ Yet he still agreed with Wilson’s plans, despite their disclosure before the CID. In a November letter to the naval journalist Arnold White, Fisher was incensed by, “....a d—d pernicious report being spread that A.K. Wilson had no war plan and that the English Fleet was not ready.” Intimating pre-knowledge of the Admiralty’s plans, he continued: “....his [Wilson’s] dispositions of the Fleet were all studied and perfect. As I believe I am the only one he ever trusted with his plans, I can speak.”⁴⁶ If Wilson differed from Fisher in strategic policy, it was in his honesty before the Defence Committee. The appearance of incompetence, however, was enough to indict the Admiralty before the politicians. By September, requests from the War Office for information on the BEF’s transport to France were being ignored by the Admiralty’s Transport Department.⁴⁷ With this development and Wilson’s wretched performance during the Agadir crisis, Haldane and Churchill pushed Asquith for an Admiralty re-organisation and the creation of a naval staff. Churchill became the new First Lord on 25th October after exchanging the Home Office with McKenna.⁴⁸ Ironically, within two years, he was promoting many of the same operations detailed by Wilson before the CID.

Confirmation that Wilson’s plans entailed a “watch” on the Bight and North Sea estuaries was apparent even before Agadir. Preliminary orders from the Home Fleet C-

⁴⁴ Hankey to Fisher, August 24, 1911, quoted in *FDSF v.1.*, pp. 392-3.

⁴⁵ Fisher to Hankey, August 29, 1911, Hankey MSS, HNKY 5/2A, Churchill College, Cambridge.

⁴⁶ Fisher to White, November 10, 1910, *FGDN v.2.*, pp. 414-15.

⁴⁷ Lambert, “Wilson”, in *First Sea Lords*, p. 48.

⁴⁸ *FDSF v.1.*, pp. 246-51; Williamson, pp.192-6; R. S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill. Volume 2: Young Statesman, 1901-14.* (London, 1967), pp. 534-41; op cit., *Winston S. Churchill :Companion Volume 2., Part II, 1907-1911*, (Boston, 1969), pp. 1294-8; P. Gretton, *Former Naval Person: Winston Churchill and the Royal Navy.* (London, 1968), pp. 38-44.

in-C in January 1911, indicated that this was the strategy although it was not “officially” communicated to the Fleet until late August. The War Orders included an inshore watch on the Elbe and Weser by the Home Fleet’s 1st and 2nd Destroyer Flotillas with the 3rd Flotilla as reinforcement, supported by armoured cruisers of the 1st and 3rd Cruiser Squadrons. The objectives were to report and, if possible, prevent a High Seas Fleet sortie and the passage of German destroyers, cruisers, and merchant transports into the North Sea. Attendant vessels (light cruisers/*Scouts*) would form a daytime cordon between the Borkum and Horn’s Reef Light Vessels, supporting the destroyer flotillas at night but retiring before sunrise. Armoured cruiser squadrons, would close on the attendant vessels during the day but would remain north of the cordon at night. These were provisional contingencies, for if a Dover Straits defence and fleet mobilisation were in place: “such a close watch of the Heligoland Bight will not be essential.” The inshore watch would be periodically withdrawn to entice out the German Fleet.⁴⁹ The plan’s outlines conformed to Plan W.3., Part 1., for an observational blockade of the Bight from Terschelling to Horn’s Reef.⁵⁰ Following the 23rd August meeting, however, dissatisfaction with Wilson’s strategy increased amongst senior fleet commanders.

May’s successor as Home Fleet C-in-C, Vice-Admiral Bridgeman, (February 1911) and his Second-in-Command, Vice-Admiral Sir George Callaghan, thought the Admiralty’s proposed watch on the Bight unworkable. Both were concerned over maintaining flotillas in the Bight due to a dearth in destroyers, Yarmouth’s inadequacy as a base for the 1st Flotilla, and organisational changes to the armoured cruiser

⁴⁹ Heligoland Bight Blockade Squadron. Preliminary War Orders for Commodore T. in Command. Issued by C-in-C Home Fleet, Admiral Sir William May, January 23, 1911, ADM 116/3096. War Plans Home Waters, 1911-1914, Case 0030; Admiralty to Callaghan, Home Fleet, “Blockade of North Sea Coast of Germany August 1911”, pp. 7-40, August 23, 1911; Bridgeman to Admiralty, August 31, 1911, ADM 137/1936 (HSA 138) Secrets Packs of the C-in-C Grand Fleet, 1914-1918, Vol. LVI. Pack 0022. Operations. Section K.—Strategical and Tactical Matters, Nos. 1-10.

⁵⁰ Refer to Chapter Four.

squadrons slated to support the blockade.⁵¹ Bridgeman and Callaghan were also alarmed by Wilson's proposal to capture Heligoland as an advanced base.⁵² The practicality of an inshore destroyer watch off the German rivers itself was questionable after a July 1911 exercise between a submarine flotilla and the 1st Flotilla produced unfavourable results.⁵³ This reinforced Bridgeman's doubts and he refused to endorse draft orders from Commodore (T), R. Arbuthnot, for inshore flotillas assigned to watch the German North Sea rivers.⁵⁴ In further secret orders to the Home Fleet, Wilson persisted with the imposition of a watch on the Bight, Heligoland's seizure, and the bombardment of German coastal fortifications. When Bridgeman succeeded Wilson as First Sea Lord and Callaghan assumed command of the Home Fleet in November 1911, the new C-in-C again challenged the feasibility of a watch on the Bight. In his recommendations to the Admiralty, Callaghan wanted a review of the North Sea blockade scenario due to destroyer shortages and expressed his "grave objection" to risking even a "portion of the main fleet" in land bombardments. Bridgeman concurred with the views of his recent 'second' and Wilson's strategy passed into abeyance.⁵⁵ Its replacement was equally flawed and, ultimately, even more untenable.

IV.

Dissatisfaction with Wilson accompanied Churchill's 25th October 1911 appointment as First Lord. As the latter's 'unofficial' advisor, Fisher was aware of an Admiralty re-organisation and recommended a reconstituted Board and key

⁵¹ "War Plans. Remarks on Certain Points In", pp. 1-24., Callaghan to Admiralty, January 9, 1912, Section VII., War Stations. Watch on German Rivers, p. 10; Commodore (T), R.K. Arbuthnot to C-in-C Home Fleet, December 18, 1911, ADM 116/3096.

⁵² "Blockade of North Sea Coast of German Empire", Memorandum by Bridgeman and Callaghan to Admiralty, August 31, 1911, ADM 1/8132. Admiralty. 1910., 29 November-December.

⁵³ Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, p. 209; Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes, *Naval Memoirs: The Narrow Seas to the Dardanelles, 1910-1915*, (London, 1934), p. 42.

⁵⁴ Callaghan to Admiralty, January 9, 1912, Section VII., War Stations. Watch on German Rivers, p. 10., ADM 116/3096.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Section X. "Notes on Operations in the North Sea."

departments. Admitting the First Sea Lord's administrative liabilities: "Wilson is no good ashore", Fisher proposed Vice-Admiral Prince Louis Battenberg as a replacement. He emphasised Captain George Ballard's recall from the fleet to replace Bethell "at once" as DNI.⁵⁶ Ballard was then commanding the battleship HMS *Britannia* in the Home Fleet's 2nd Division and had also been considered by McKenna as the obvious choice for DNI.⁵⁷ Although the Board's re-arrangement bore little resemblance to Fisher's suggestions, Ballard was not excluded.⁵⁸ After drafting a memorandum on staff organisation, Ballard was subsequently appointed Director Operations Division (DOD-Planning) on the new Admiralty War Staff--a position analogous to his stint as ADNI War Division in 1904-06.⁵⁹ His appointment and work as the Service's pre-eminent "strategist" during 1902-07, would again influence the the Admiralty's war planning throughout 1912-14.

It was Wilson's opposition to Churchill's naval staff, and not strategic planning, that led to his removal. On 28th October, the First Lord issued a Naval War Staff memorandum outlining its organisation, role, and staff officer training.⁶⁰ Wilson countered Churchill's paper with the reasons for his resistance to a staff system. The appointment of a new Chief of the War Staff (COS) would muddle the authority and communication between the Service chief, the DNI, DNM, and DNO. Wilson reaffirmed his (and Fisher's) dictum that, "The preparation of War plans is a matter that must be dealt with by the First Sea Lord himself", aided by his Naval Assistant, the

⁵⁶ Fisher to J.A. Spender, October 25, 1911, *FGDN* v.2., pp. 397-9; Fisher to Churchill, October 26 and November 4, 1911, R. Churchill, *Young Statesman*, pp. 1300, 1321.

⁵⁷ G.A. Ballard, Record of Business, letters, &c., December 9, 1910, Ballard MSS, MS80/200, NMM; Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, p.265, endnote 262.

⁵⁸ *FGDN* v.2., pp. 399-400, Footnote 1.

⁵⁹ G.A. Ballard, "Record of Business, Letters, &c.", 1 December, 1911 and 8th January, 1912, Ballard MSS, MS 80/200., NMM; Memorandum by Captain George A. Ballard to Rear-Admiral Sir C. Ottley, Secretary CID and later passed on to the First Lord, Winston Churchill, October 1911, CAB 17/8, Naval War Staff. 1911.

⁶⁰ R. Churchill, *Churchill: Companion* v.2., Part 2, pp. 1303-12; Gretton, pp. 79-81.

DNI, and the Mobilisation Department. Peacetime “paper schemes and theories” were untrustworthy in war due to the changing conditions of naval warfare. As strategic policy was determined by “experiment” and manoeuvres, Wilson debunked the idea that staff officers be trained “to think” and not be able to perform their duties when afloat.⁶¹ The CID Secretary, Rear-Admiral Ottley, turned Wilson’s strategy against him as proof that a staff system was urgently required at the Admiralty. Condemning a blockade on Germany’s North Sea estuaries and Heligoland’s seizure, Ottley advocated a staff in view of Wilson’s failure to consult the Ballard Committee’s appraisal that any Heligoland project was “utterly impracticable”. According to Ottley, the Committee’s work (i.e. Plan A/A1’s distant blockade) “was utterly thrown away” by Wilson’s insistence on the discredited Heligoland proposal, amphibious landings against a determined enemy, and the employment of ships against forts.⁶² Ballard’s comments on Wilson’s memorandum noted Wilson’s own admission that some form of a staff was needed to assist the First Sea Lord and stressed the necessity of properly trained staff officers.⁶³

Wilson ultimately fell victim to his own irascible nature and an autocratic rigidity instilled by the Victorian Navy. Like other senior officers of his generation, Wilson, and even Fisher, could not understand that the complexity of strategy, tactics, technology, communications, finance, and administration at the turn of the century required flexibility, specially trained officers, and an effective bureaucracy to attain wartime fighting efficiency.⁶⁴ With Wilson’s attitude impeding promised changes,

⁶¹ Wilson’s October 30th memorandum to Churchill in Bradford, *Wilson*, pp. 229-35 and R. Churchill, *Churchill, Companion v.2., Part, 2*, pp. 1312-16.

⁶² “Notes on Sir Arthur Wilson’s Memorandum by Sir Charles Ottley.”, 10pp., November 1, 1911; Ottley to Churchill, November 2, 1911, CAB 17/8, Naval War Staff 1911.

⁶³ “Notes on Sir Arthur Wilson’s Memorandum.”, Captain G.A. Ballard, November 1, 1911, *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ J.T. Sumida, “Naval Administration and Policy in the Age of Fisher”, *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 54, No.1., January 1990, pp. 1-26. For an in-depth examination some of these trends in the Victorian and Edwardian Navy, see Gordon, *Rules of the Game*.

Churchill received Asquith's assent to replace Wilson and made a clean sweep of the Admiralty Board on 28th November 1911. Wilson relinquished his office to the former C-in-C Home Fleet, Bridgeman, in December.⁶⁵

The Admiralty War Staff was instituted on 8th January 1912, based on a staff outline from the former DNI and Second Sea Lord, Vice-Admiral Prince Louis Battenberg.⁶⁶ Ballard and Fisher's former Naval Assistant, Captain Herbert Richmond, provided further input on the Staff's organisational duties.⁶⁷ The organisation, however, possessed serious structural flaws and was essentially a modified Navy War Council. Unlike earlier planning groups, a "Chief of the War Staff" (COS) reported directly to the First Sea Lord and was responsible for the work of three divisions: Operations, Intelligence, and Mobilisation. In effect, the Staff re-established the old NID structure. Each division was headed by a separate director, akin to the ADNIs, who had equal access to the COS and the Service chief. The Staff's principal task involved the operational study of war as opposed to its technical and material components. The Operations Division under Ballard handled the actual war planning. Like the NID, the Navy War Council, and Fisher's pseudo planning groups, the War Staff was an advisory body with no executive powers.⁶⁸

Its main defect lay in the COS's position. As the First Sea Lord's principal advisor, the COS had no direct authority as he was not a Board member. Consequently,

⁶⁵ *FDSF v. I.*, pp. 256-8; Gretton, pp. 82-4; W. S. Churchill, *The World Crisis v. I.*, (London, 1923), pp. 81-6.

⁶⁶ Report by Battenberg to Churchill, November 22, 1911, reproduced in Kerr, *Battenberg*, pp. 235-8.

⁶⁷ For Ballard's contribution refer to footnote 59 above. Richmond suggested a separate "Operations Division" to handle war planning. Richmond to Rear-Admiral Troubridge, Private Secretary to First Lord, "Considerations affecting a Staff.", (n.d.) 1911, Richmond MSS, RIC/12/4, NMM.

⁶⁸ Churchill to Greene, November 19, 1911, ADM 1/8377, *The Naval War Staff, 1911-1914*; "Memorandum by the First Lord on a Naval Staff", *The Times*, January 8th, 1911, pp. 9f, 10a; "Naval War Staff". I.-Memorandum by the First Lord on a Naval War Staff.", January 1, 1911, Sir William Graham Greene MSS, GEE/2. Printed Papers re. Administration (1869-1921), NMM; *Naval Staff*, Chapter XI., pp. 52-4.

strategic and command responsibilities were confused, the point made by Wilson in his late October memorandum.⁶⁹ Ideally, the First Sea Lord should have been the COS, as suggested by Wilson and alluded to by Slade and Bethell during, and immediately after, the “Beresford” Inquiry.⁷⁰ This flaw endured when the next Service head, Battenberg, refused to incorporate the COS’s duties with his office. It was a reversal of his opinion in 1902 that the First Sea Lord should head any future naval staff. Once in power, Battenberg refused to lower his status by becoming COS to the First Lord.⁷¹

The War Staff’s structure retained the over-centralised policy from the Fisher-Wilson regimes. As ADOD (February 1913-May 1915), Richmond characterised the War Staff as: “a body which never was nor ever could be a war staff as it was deficient in all characteristics that are needed for staff work.” The main weakness involved everything passing through the COS: “There is no decentralisation, and his mind has to grapple with every problem that arises even in its details....The result of this fear to decentralise is that the First Sea Lord and Chief of Staff are so overworked that they cannot consider suggestions brought to them”. Another problem was that the “mass” of staff officers were “wholly unfit for their duties.”⁷² Fisher, too, was aware of the staff’s deficiencies. In a war, the First Sea Lord would retain supreme control over strategic policy, as the War Staff, “is an exceedingly useful body to be kicked and to deal with d----d rot!and make out schemes for the German Emperor to have next morning at breakfast!”⁷³ Churchill’s Admiralty War Staff was merely a revamped version of the previous “staff” organisations: a body bereft of the authority needed to properly deal with planning matters and confounded by an unclear demarcation of administrative

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-4; Bradford, *Wilson*, p. 229-31.

⁷⁰ Refer to Chapter Five, pp. 182-4.

⁷¹ Battenberg to Fisher, February 25, 1902 in Kerr, *Battenberg*, pp. 144-9; *FDSF v. I.*, pp. 265-6; Hunt, *Sailor-Scholar*, pp. 22-3.

⁷² Gretton, p. 162.

⁷³ Fisher to Esher, January 3, 1912, *FGDN v.2.*, p.425.

tasks.

Other obstacles impaired the War Staff's effectiveness. A Staff Training Division was advocated in early 1914, but it passed into abeyance with the outbreak of the war.⁷⁴ Excepting Ballard and a few others, there was a paucity of experienced personnel to educate and train officers for the new organisation. A Royal Navy Staff Course was established as part of the War College in January 1912, but junior officer education was incommensurate with regular staff duties. Course instruction emphasised technical subjects over strategy and tactics because many senior officers opposed the training of specialised staff officers and distrusted the staff concept. This attitude affected staff candidate quality, as those nominated to attend the Staff Course were below average ability.⁷⁵ According to Vice-Admiral K.G.B. Dewar, a lecturer at the War College from 1909 to 1913: "We had the opportunity but not the capital to float a staff."⁷⁶ Along with its structural defects, this lack of talent hamstrung the War Staff's strategic endeavours into the war.

Another liability was the First Lord's continual interference. Churchill acted as "war lord", relying heavily on policy advice from Fisher and the Second Sea Lord, Battenberg. His authoritarianism was evident in his treatment of Wilson's successor, Sir Francis Bridgeman. Churchill excluded Bridgeman from strategic affairs and dealt instead with the first COS, Rear-Admiral Ernest Troubridge, the First Lord's appointee and an officer not widely noted for his intellectual acuity.⁷⁷ Bridgeman was given no choice in Troubridge's appointment nor any say in the reconstitution of the NID and NMD into the War Staff.⁷⁸ Not as ineffectual a Service chief as some sources have

⁷⁴ *Naval Staff*, pp. 56-8.

⁷⁵ *FDSF v.1.*, pp. 265-6; Hunt, *Sailor-Scholar*, p. 23; Vice-Admiral K.G.B. Dewar, *The Navy From Within*, (London, 1939), pp. 152-4.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 154.

⁷⁷ *FDSF v.2.*, pp. 21-2.

⁷⁸ Lambert, "Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman (1911-1912)" in *First Sea Lords*, pp. 56-7.

claimed,⁷⁹ he found it difficult to work with the impetuous Churchill and being treated as a mere figurehead. Bridgeman's attempts to exert his office further strained his relationship with Churchill and led to his replacement on the grounds of ill health by Battenberg (December 1912-October 1914) after a year as First Sea Lord.⁸⁰ Churchill's interference in Admiralty strategy became evermore pervasive and disruptive leading into the First World War.

V.

Following the War Staff's creation, the Admiralty re-evaluated its operational contingencies against Germany. In early April 1912, the C-in-C Home Fleet received official confirmation that the close observational blockade of the German North Sea littoral was "considered as cancelled."⁸¹ As a replacement, Troubridge and the War Staff devised the so-called "Intermediate blockade". Wrongly labelled, "the first attempt by the Admiralty to set down on paper the Royal Navy's real plan of campaign in the event of war,"⁸² it proved more flawed than the strategy it was meant to supersede. It entailed a cruiser/floatilla blockade cordon across the North Sea from the Norwegian coast to a location near the latitude of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne (55° N). From there the line ran south to Texel Island and the Dutch Coast. The British fleet would cruise off the Scottish coast, westward of the patrol line in support of the cordons. Once contact with the German fleet was established, the main fleet would proceed to intercept and engage.⁸³ Pressed by Churchill to prepare an alternative to Wilson's "close" blockade

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-73; *FDSF* v.1., pp. 258-9.

⁸⁰ Lambert, "Bridgeman" in Murfett, pp. 54-73; *FDSF*, v.1., 252-64; Gretton, pp. 92-5; R. Churchill, *Churchill* v.2., pp. 630-41; op cit., *Companion Volume II, Part 3*, pp. 1653-4, 1657, 1677, 1681, 1684-95.

⁸¹ Admiralty to Callaghan, April 9, 1912, ADM 116/3096.

⁸² Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, pp. 262-3.

⁸³ "Memorandum Approved for Issue to Staff Officers.", April 15, 1912 [not issued], M-001/12, ADM 116/3096.

and devoid of planning experience,⁸⁴ Troubridge, likely culled the details of his proposal from the 1908 “W” series plans. Whereas Wilson had followed W.3., Part 1’s guidelines for a watch on the Bight by a line of cruisers between Terschelling and Horn’s Reef, the War Staff’s design placed the same line further out into the North Sea, minus inshore flotillas and “parent vessels” off the German estuaries.

The weakness of Troubridge’s plan was confirmed in late July-early August 1912 Home Fleet manoeuvres. *Blue* Fleet’s (British) goal involved establishing secure lines of communication to obstruct *Red* Fleet’s (German) movement to achieve “unchallenged supremacy” in the North Sea. This included a cordon from Flamborough Head to Stavanger in Norway--an observational line nearly identical to the War Staff’s April outline. A second line between the Orkneys and the Shetlands to Lat.: 61°N would prevent *Red* cruisers from entering the Atlantic. *Blue* Fleet’s main units were concentrated off Scotland’s east coast. *Red* would weaken and destroy the enemy’s surveillance by concentrated attacks on *Blue*’s cruiser cordons. Secondary goals included landing an expeditionary force on *Blue* territory and attacks on trade. The Manoeuvre Umpire-in-Chief, Admiral Sir William May, observed that the “F.S.” (Flamborough-Stavanger) line failed to prevent *Red* Fleet from appearing off *Blue*’s coast on two occasions and was highly vulnerable to concentrated attacks by *Red* squadrons and flotillas. He surmised:

That it is hard to arrange satisfactorily for the patrol of such a long line, where the furthest position from a base is 340 miles must be freely admitted, but the system of stringing out cruisers and destroyers has been shewn to have drawbacks; further by this system scouting is carried out practically along one line which fails to give sufficient warning of the approach of an enemy. It also allows for the enemy to cruise about outside the range of visibility with impunity.⁸⁵

Churchill’s decision not to adopt Troubridge’s system until it was tested in manoeuvres

⁸⁴ Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, p. 262.

⁸⁵ “Naval Manoeuvres 1912, Remarks by Umpire-in-Chief.”, August 5, 1912, May MSS, May/10, Tactical Reports 1908-1913, Essays on tactics and reports on Manoeuvres 1912-1913.

proved wise given its abysmal performance in the summer exercise.⁸⁶ Added to the logistical and communications nightmare created by the long cordon, the Navy lacked the cruisers and destroyers to maintain a 300 mile plus observation line across the North Sea.

Deeming Troubridge's plan an "experiment" which had "failed completely", Churchill ensured that the design was abandoned as an official contingency.⁸⁷ The cordon plan was "generally condemned by naval opinion outside the Admiralty".⁸⁸ This has been interpreted as the C-in-C Home Fleet's, Callaghan, influence on Admiralty's planning. The argument that Callaghan's condemnations of the "intermediate" blockade and Wilson's "close" blockade led to the adoption of the distant blockade strategy is, however, not at all conclusive.⁸⁹ The "intermediate" blockade's failure resulted in Troubridge's removal as COS. He was succeeded by the Naval War College President, Vice-Admiral Sir Henry Jackson, in January 1913.⁹⁰ Before that transition, the North Sea strategic dilemma had been examined and solved by the Service's most qualified planner.

The DOD's assessment of the "intermediate" blockade was not as scathing as those by Churchill and May. In a report on the August manoeuvres, Ballard thought that flotillas could maintain their stations on a long observation line. A "close and perpetual watch" on the enemy's main exits was, however, "virtually impossible" as British flotillas had to operate at the maximum distance from their bases. Close observation on a large scale was impossible until suitable numbers of ocean-going submarines were

⁸⁶ Telegram from Churchill to Admiralty, 24th May, 1912, ADM 116/1169, Manoeuvres 1912., Case 1625.

⁸⁷ "Notes on the Manoeuvres: Prepared for the Prime Minister by the First Lord.", October 17, 1912, ADM 116/3381, First Lord of the Admiralty, Miscellaneous Papers, 1911-1914, Case 5793.

⁸⁸ W. Churchill, *World Crisis*, v.1., pp. 153-4; Churchill to Clementine Churchill, March 24-25, 1912, R. Churchill (ed), *Churchill Companion Vol.2.*, pp. 1529-30.

⁸⁹ Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, pp. 261-4; op cit., "Bridgeman" in *First Sea Lords*, p. 63.

⁹⁰ Churchill to Asquith, August 15, 1912, in R. Churchill, *Young Statesman*, p. 1633; *Naval Staff*, Appendix B, pp. 121-2.

available. To detect the enemy's passage into the North Sea, a mean distance near 3rd Meridian East Longitude was the best position for an observational line in a war with Germany. Instead of constructing additional cruisers and submarines for a watch on the Bight, an extensive mining policy might impede the enemy's passage into the North Sea. Similar to Ottley's 1905 close mine blockade proposal, Ballard advocated that a 160 mile long minefield be laid off Germany's western littoral. Such a barrier could prove beneficial to any commercial blockade for: "if a steamer or two on the way from Rotterdam to Hamburg were blown up off the Texel, the traffic to German ports would almost certainly cease at once." Until the Admiralty approved a mining policy, "it is not considered that the existing War Plans should be materially changed." The "Intermediate" blockade remained the only feasible alternative, "a middle course", between the "undesirable extremes of a close blockade" or abandoning all observation in the North Sea.⁹¹

Mining was not Ballard's only solution to the vagrancies posed by the close and "Intermediate" blockades. In late November-December 1912, War Plans/Orders were issued to Callaghan embodying the distant blockade scenario originally detailed in 1907's War Plan A/A1. Ballard and the Operations Division redrafted this plan with the same basic assumptions behind the original 1907 design informing the 1912 version.⁹² The idea was to utilise Britain's geographical advantage to cut off all German shipping from oceanic trade, secure England's coasts from invasions and raids, and cover the BEF's transport to France. This strategy, "resemble[d] those which led to the successful battles in the Anglo-Dutch wars.", the same seventeenth century paradigm that was the basis for Plan A/A1 in 1907. A prolonged distant blockade would cause "serious economic consequences to Germany", forcing the High Seas Fleet to break the blockade

⁹¹ "Observation Force in North Sea. Remarks on War Orders for, in connection with lessons of the 1912 Manoeuvres.", Captain G.A. Ballard, DOD, September 16, 1912, ADM 116/866B.

⁹² *Naval Staff*, p. 55, footnote 1.; War Plans and War Orders, No.1., Home Fleets. No. 0020 (copy), 16 December, 1912 and No. 0025, 18 February, 1913 with corrections by the DOD, ADM 137/818, (H.S. 818), Home Fleet & Detached Squadrons. October 1913 to July 1914.

and instigating a fleet action closer to British bases than their own.⁹³

The 1912 November-December War Plan/Orders repeated virtually every detail of the Ballard Committee's Plan A/A1. A "Northern Blockade" of armoured cruisers would patrol between the Orkneys and Shetlands, on to the Norwegian coast, to prevent the passage of German shipping. Destroyer/submarine flotillas would patrol the Dover Straits to block the English Channel. The main British fleet, based on the Scottish coast, would support the northern cordon while the Channel Fleet reinforced the southern line. Grand Fleet cruiser squadrons would conduct North Sea "sweeps" to detect German sorties, akin to Wilson's suggestions in his 1907 "Remarks". New provisions included a line of cruisers in the Western Approaches and a submarine watch in the Bight to attack German ships issuing from the North Sea exits; the last aspect corresponding with Ballard's report on the August 1912 Manoeuvres. The C-in-C Home Fleet would frustrate German attempts to break the blockade, land an invasion force, and bring the enemy fleet to action on a "good occasion". Should the Germans attempt a northern break-out, the C-in-C was directed to cut off the enemy fleet, supported by the Channel Fleet. While Callaghan may command both fleets at sea, it was "imperative" that the Admiralty, and not the C-in-C, control the overall strategic situation.⁹⁴

The late 1912 Home Fleet War Orders have been examined in seminal and more recent studies but, surprisingly, the chronological significance of the plan has been overlooked.⁹⁵ The evidence reveals that as a compromise to the close and "Intermediate" blockades, the distant blockade was adopted much earlier than July 1914, as is generally

⁹³ G.A. Ballard, "Remarks on the Framing of Certain Plans....", May 3, 1909, ADM 1/8997; Chapter 3 above; "War Plans, General Instructions.", December 16, 1912, ADM 116/3412, War Plans and War Orders Home Fleets and Detached Squadrons. November 1912-December 1913;

⁹⁴ Admiralty to C-in-C Home Fleets. "War Plans and War Orders", November 25, December 16, 1912, and February 18, 1913, ADM 116/3412, War Plans and War Orders Home Fleets and Detached Squadrons. November 1912-December 1913. The February War Plan/Orders contained only minor changes to flotilla dispositions.

⁹⁵ *FDSF v. I.*, pp. 369-71; Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, pp. 264-8.

believed to be the case.⁹⁶ Secondly, the plan was clearly attributable to the DOD and was not a by-product of the C-in-C Home Fleet's 1911-12 critiques as claimed by recent interpretations.⁹⁷ It was a continuation not only of Ballard's 1897 RUSI essay, but the NID's North Sea strategical studies inaugurated in 1902 and developed throughout the Fisher period as a response to German naval policy and the period's diplomatic uncertainties.

The North Sea strategical problem was also analysed by a junior officer affiliated with the War College. Commander K.G.B. Dewar was aware of the projected blockade designs through his work at the College as a lecturer. In early 1912, he investigated the feasibility of both the close and "intermediate" blockades. According to Dewar, British blockade theories "might have been produced by a Rip Van Winkle who had never seen a steamship, much less a submarine, torpedo or mine." He viewed the close blockade on the Bight as "a suicidal policy which would open a red road of ruin to our fleet", while the intermediate blockade was exposed to constant attack from concentrated enemy squadrons. The mid-North Sea blockade was "impracticable" for it was difficult to watch and effectively support a 300 mile long cordon. It required the support of the main fleet which could be drawn into waters teeming with enemy torpedo craft. Like May, and to a lesser extent Ballard, Dewar believed that the "intermediate" plan employed an excessive number of cruisers and flotillas which stripped the main fleet of its support.⁹⁸ These deficiencies compelled Dewar to find an alternative.

As the topic of a RUSI paper, Dewar outlined the same strategy recently re-adopted by the Admiralty. His April 1913 *JRUSI* Gold Medal Prize Essay prescribed the distant blockade as the antidote to defects in the other blockade designs. The essay mirrored the 1907 plan developed by Ballard and Hankey, resurrected, and communicated to the Home Fleet in November-December 1912 and early 1913. The

⁹⁶ *FDSF v. I.*, pp. 371-3, 382-3; Williamson, p. 318; Mackay, *Fisher*, p. 443.

⁹⁷ Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, pp. 261-70; op cit, "Bridgeman" in *First Sea Lords*, p. 63.

⁹⁸ Dewar, *Navy From Within*, pp. 145-6, 149-50.

northern Orkneys-Shetland-Norway exit would be blocked by a British cruisers supported by the main fleet based on Scotland while the Dover Strait was closed by destroyer, torpedo-boat, and submarine flotillas. To effectively seal the Channel, the southern line would be supported by a pre-dreadnought squadron, the same Channel Fleet stipulated in the late 1912 War Orders to Callaghan. Even the stated objective of Dewar's strategy, the strangulation of German overseas trade, emulated the Ballard Committee's rejuvenated war plan.⁹⁹

Similarities between the DOD's contingency and Dewar's essay were not mere coincidence.¹⁰⁰ Although details of Dewar's contact with Ballard are unknown, some consultation involving the former's RUSI paper occurred. Like Ballard, Dewar was a burgeoning naval academic and a friend of the ADOD, Herbert Richmond. Dewar and Richmond were also founding members of *The Naval Review* and the Naval Society as a forum for intellectual debate within the Service.¹⁰¹ Interestingly, the publication of Dewar's essay corresponded with Ballard's tenure as a Councillor on the RUSI Board.¹⁰² Dewar's paper was significant for the last chapter, "Application and Conclusions", containing the details of his plan, was suppressed by the essay competition judge, Rear-Admiral Sir Frederick C. D. Sturdee, for security reasons—another indication that the distant blockade strategy was official policy by late 1912-early 1913.¹⁰³ Sturdee succeeded Jackson as COS in July 1914, which corresponded

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, Appendix 1; Commander Kenneth G. B. Dewar, "What is the Influence of Commerce on the Operations of War? How did it Affect Our Naval Policy in the Past and How Does It in the Present Day?", *JRUSI*, April 1913, Volume LVII, No. 422., pp. 449-500.

¹⁰⁰ *Naval Staff*, p. 55, footnote 1.

¹⁰¹ For Dewar's career at the War College, his association with Richmond, and the formation of the Naval Society and *Naval Review*, refer to: *Navy From Within*; Dewar MSS, DEW/39/1-4, DEW/1, Pre-First World War: Papers relating to Dewar's career before 1914, DEW/33 Private Correspondence: Personal Letters from Dewar to Richmond, 1915-1918; Hunt, *Sailor-Scholar*, pp. 27-39; J. Goldrick and J.B. Hattendorf (eds), *Mahan is Not Enough: Proceedings of a Conference on the Works of Sir Julian Corbett and Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond*, (Newport, 1993), pp. 83-102.

¹⁰² *JRUSI*, April 1913, Volume LVII., No. 422., Title page.

¹⁰³ Dewar, *Navy From Within*, pp. 146-9.

with the publication of Dewar's final chapter in *The Naval Review*'s second volume and the final Admiralty confirmation of the distant blockade strategy.¹⁰⁴ Whatever his motives or influences, Dewar's essay gave the distant blockade plan intellectual accreditation as a credible wartime strategy against Germany. Churchill's increased meddling in strategic matters, however, meant that considerable misconceptions still remained over the Admiralty's plans for a war with Germany.

VI.

The desire for an alternative to the distant blockade and the First Lord's interference in strategy originated with officers desiring a more aggressive strategy against Germany such as Churchill's outgoing Naval Secretary, Rear-Admiral David Beatty. Before assuming command of the Battle Cruiser Squadron, he protested the ambiguity of Admiralty instructions to Callaghan regarding potential German actions. Beatty complained to Churchill that no suggestions were made about the "propriety" of securing a Norwegian base to cover the Skaw or other offensive operations of that nature.¹⁰⁵ The fear that, "our general views on strategy will become dominated by purely defensive strategy", was held by others including the COS's Assistant, Captain Arthur V. Vyvyan.¹⁰⁶ With a renewed invasion debate in the CID, Churchill reconsidered the distant blockade as the Navy's primary strategy.¹⁰⁷ His new stance was encapsulated in a February 1913 letter to Battenberg. Agreeing that the distant blockade was the "guiding policy" in a long war, it could only be maintained on a "basis of moral superiority." That "moral superiority" was only possible through an offensive at the outset of a war and intermittently during its course. Only by conducting "ourselves [so]

¹⁰⁴ *Naval Staff*, Appendix B., p. 122; [Dewar], "The Influence of Commerce in War.", *The Naval Review*, Volume II., (London, 1914), pp. 159-64; "War Orders No.1. – War Plans (War With Germany), July 1, 1914, ADM 116/3096; *FDSF* v.1., pp. 372-3, 382-3.

¹⁰⁵ War Plans-note by First Lord to First Sea Lord, containing a memorandum written by Rear-Admiral Beatty, January 21, 1913, ADM 116/3412.

¹⁰⁶ "Remarks on the 1913 Manoeuvres." Captain Arthur V. Vyvyan, Assistant to COS, n/d, 1913, ADM 116/1169.

¹⁰⁷ *FDSF* v.1., pp. 354-7.

that the sea is full of nameless terrors for him-instead of for us”, would Germany fear the Royal Navy’s “teeth” and make blockade practicable. Churchill advocated blocking the Elbe to cover the BEF’s transport to France in conjunction with a close blockade of the Heligoland Bight as a “rigorous interlude or prelude”. Britain could easily establish an “overwhelming” flotilla superiority in the Bight for at least a week. Supported by the Grand Fleet, a “general converging drive” into the Bight by all flotillas and cruiser squadrons would “catch up in front” any German sorties and “sweep the whole back in a jumble” into the Elbe and towards the Skaw. Both North Sea debouches could then be picketed by the “full strength” of British flotillas supported by cruisers and battle cruisers to prevent German attempts to disrupt the expedition to France.¹⁰⁸

The COS agreed with Churchill’s estimation that the Admiralty’s plans lacked “initiative” but was sceptical over the alternatives. Jackson hinted that a push into the Bight was problematic given the shortage of sea-going destroyers required for such an operation. It was “unwise” to despatch a weak British force to blockade the Bight given the numbers and effectiveness of German torpedo flotillas.¹⁰⁹ Ballard, too, voiced similar concerns over Churchill’s projected North Sea forays. The plan to establish an “overwhelming” flotilla superiority was unrealistic. Against 200 German torpedo craft, Britain could only muster 140 destroyers from all its flotillas. Ballard cautioned that 46 were antecedents to the *River* Class and of “indifferent capacity for oversea work.” The remaining 94 (*Rivers, Tribals, Beagles*) were good sea boats but lacked the fuel capacity to remain on station near the Bight for no more than two days. Churchill’s “sweep” could only be effective by employing battle cruisers, cruisers, and light cruisers, in “a big ship movement”. Cruiser squadrons and flotillas would have to arrive simultaneously at points along an arc off the North Sea estuaries, staying clear of Heligoland. At sunset, the cruisers would have to retire due to the dangers posed by German torpedo-craft and submarines. British flotillas could maintain a night watch, but

¹⁰⁸ Churchill to Battenberg, February 17, 1913, ADM 116/3412.

¹⁰⁹ “Remarks on War Plans and on the First Lord’s Notes on the Subject”, Vice-Admiral Sir Henry Jackson, March 11, 1913, ADM 116/3412.

they too would have to retire at sunrise because of the German cruiser threat. Ballard viewed this as a compromise option, but the tone of his recommendations did not support operations in or near the Bight.¹¹⁰

The ADOD, Richmond, concurred with his superiors' assessments of Churchill's plan. Deeming the renewed call to block the Elbe as "absolutely impracticable" and inshore operations as "the most disastrous thing-viz., exposing themselves to defeat in detail", Richmond condemned an offensive in the Bight:

The grand drive he [Churchill] suggests is the apotheosis of weakness: a long line of destroyers & cruisers, weak everywhere, strong nowhere can do nothing. A well handled concentrated force can cut into it anywhere & capsize all your plans....The 1st Lord supposes that after this drive we could 'picket' the Elbe with the full strength of our destroyers. We could not. We would not have 50% of them after this drive. Consider the fuel problem alone & you see that it must be so....Sweeps, hustling the enemy, getting him into a jumble-all these are words only. They mean nothing: they will not affect well considered plans of a thinking enemy any more than beating drums and waving flags would do.¹¹¹

The First Lord had, however, already begun another examination of an offensive North Sea thrust and operations rejected during the Fisher-Wilson regimes.

The Operation Division's frustration with Churchill was partly due to the fact that, like Fisher, he had established his own pseudo planning body separate from the War Staff. In January 1913, Churchill created an ambiguous planning group, headed by Rear-Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly, (commanding 3rd Battle Squadron, Home Fleet, 1913-14) to re-examine the close blockade/ advanced bases theme developed in the 1890's. Bayly's team was "to investigate the feasibility of seizing a base on the Dutch, German, Danish, or Scandinavian coasts for flotilla operations on the outbreak of war

¹¹⁰ "Remarks by DOD, Captain Ballard, on First Lord's paper", [March] 1913, ADM.116/3412.

¹¹¹ "ADOD, Captain Herbert Richmond's remarks on the First Lord's paper and letter of February 17, 1913", [March] 1913, *Ibid.*

with Germany.”¹¹² Three objectives underscored these proposals: enticing out the High Seas Fleet, establishing bases for a close blockade on Germany’s North Sea ports, and eliminating German raids against Britain.¹¹³ Bayly’s June 1913 plan involved seizing Borkum and/or Sylt as advanced flotilla bases. Each expedition included 12,000 troops supported by older *Royal Sovereign* Class battleships and armoured cruisers carrying the flat boats for disembarkation. Vigorous mine-sweeping and smokescreens would precede the actual landings. An operation to take Esbjerg and Faro Island on Jutland’s western coast was also projected. Since, “There does not appear to be any reasonable difficulty in taking this place,....” the initial landing of a brigade, followed by a division, would suffice to hold the port despite Esbjerg’s being only 20 miles from the German frontier by rail. Repeating 1904-08 themes, Bayly recommended a destroyer raid up the Elbe to destroy the Kiel Canal’s locks. Unlike Wilson’s earlier recommendation, however, Heligoland’s seizure was ruled out due to the island’s strong fortifications and dangers posed by German submarines/torpedo craft.¹¹⁴

Bayly’s reanimation of the close blockade/advanced base concept did not sit well with the Admiralty staff. Writing to Battenberg, Jackson dismissed Bayly’s plan as: “an operation which it was not essential to carry out as the first step in a war”, despite its so-called “moral effect.” Taking a flotilla base was too costly: “it seems as if the losses we should incur in such an undertaking would probably be greater than the

¹¹² Admiralty to Bayly, January 31, 1913, ADM 137/452. (HS 452). Seizure of an Advanced Base. September 1914 to April 1915. Mackay, pp. 455-6; M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill, Volume 3: The Challenge of War, 1914-1916*, (London, 1971), pp. 19-21. The other officers assembled to work under Bayly included: Rear-Admiral Arthur C. Leveson, who succeeded Ballard as DOD in May 1914 and Brigadier-General Sir George Aston, RM who was attached to the War Staff for “special services” throughout 1913-14.

¹¹³ “ Jackson to First Sea Lord., Invasion Question. Seizure of Advanced Bases. Remarks by Rear-Admiral Bayly.”, March 17, 1913, ADM 137/452.

¹¹⁴ Enclosure: (A) General remarks on Overseas expeditions; (B) Borkum-Germany- North Sea; (C) Lister Deep-Sylt-Germany, North Sea; (D) Esbjerg-Denmark, North Sea; (E) General remarks on attacking and establishing bases at Heligoland, Cuxhaven, &c., Bayly to COS Jackson, June 30, 1913, ADM 137/452.

losses which occur in an attempt to carry out a close blockade without the base.”¹¹⁵ Callaghan too, failed to see the logic behind reverting to a recently abandoned strategy. The close blockade: “appears to be still more impractical now, it is useless to reconsider it.”¹¹⁶ The most telling criticism of Bayly’s projects came from the DOD. Confirming the War Staff’s views on the costs of taking either Borkum or Sylt, Bayly’s group had an “imperfect knowledge” of the German defences which made their projects, “a gamble at best.” Ballard continued:

Gambles in war are justifiable if an adequate advantage may be forthcoming, but here that does not appear to be the case. The sole object of the proposed expeditions is to obtain an advance flotilla base....Destroyers and colliers lying inside Sylt would be within range of German siege artillery on the mainland. Inside Borkum they would be constantly harassed by small torpedo craft arriving by canal from Emden. In neither anchorage would they enjoy any rest. Moreover they would be undefended against attack from the sea....We do not consider an undefended harbour a proper flotilla base on our own coast. Still less, therefore, would these practically undefended anchorages on the coast of the Continent within 3 hours steaming of the main German bases answer requirements.

The DOD categorised proposed landing sites on Sylt as “too unstable a factor”, compared to Staff studies which had ruled out these locales and the employment of smokescreens to cover the actual landings. The Operations Division never bothered to formulate a plan to take Esbjerg as it was “outside the region of practical war considerations which it takes the staff all their time to attend to.”¹¹⁷

Ballard’s objections to Bayly’s schemes were significant given his expertise with the close blockade/advanced base concept detailed in his 1897 RUSI paper and work as an Admiralty planner throughout 1902-07. Closely affiliated with this theme, why did Ballard reject the Bayly-Churchill recommendations in 1913? Like Jackson, Callaghan, and other enlightened officers in the Service, Ballard viewed such operations as an

¹¹⁵ COS to First Sea Lord, re: submission of Bayly’s Interim remarks, March 17, 1913, *Ibid*.

¹¹⁶ C-in-C Home Fleet to Admiralty, “Employment of Destroyers in War”, (6pp.), October 3, 1913, Naval Papers, DS/MS/20, No. 240., Battenberg MSS, IWM. Cited in Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, p.270, endnote 296 as MB/T26/240.

¹¹⁷ Ballard to Jackson, July 10, 1913, ADM 137/452.

anathema under modern conditions when more sensible alternatives were in place such as the distant blockade adopted in November-December 1912. As codified in Plan A/A1, the distant blockade was the most effective method of throttling Germany's overseas trade and drawing the High Seas Fleet out without endangering Britain's maritime supremacy. A close investment of the Bight or German coast was a costly step backwards. More than anyone then at the Admiralty, Ballard knew that Bayly's proposals were not meant as separate operations but as preliminaries to a Baltic campaign aimed at Germany's strategic and economic vitals as detailed in Plan C/C1.¹¹⁸ Independently, inshore operations off Germany's North Sea estuaries were a waste in lives, resources, and energy. This was alluded to in his remarks on Bayly's plans: "Gambles in war are justifiable if an adequate advantage may be forthcoming...", which was the case in a sustained strike against German strategic/economic interests in the Baltic, but not the "moral effect" of Churchill's Heligoland Bight foray.

Besides his critiques, Ballard provided another alternative to the close blockade. In a February 1913 supplement to his September 1912 proposal, Ballard outlined an offensive North Sea mine blockade. While the distant blockade would eliminate German overseas trade, British naval pressure on Germany would be "greatly minimised" by neutral trade. A close investment of enemy ports would remove this trade, but expose British fleets "to a degree of risk which would jeopardise our whole naval superiority." Because the close blockade "has become very difficult, if not impossible", an offensive mine campaign to preclude neutral action was a credible consideration.¹¹⁹ Ballard countered political and moral objections to this policy by outlining the legal use of mines in war. The 1907 Hague Peace Conference's Convention VII did not restrict the employment of offensive mines off an enemy's port nor in international waters. By notifying mariners of potential danger areas, Britain's legal and humanitarian responsibilities were effectively met. The "moral effect" of even

¹¹⁸ Refer to Chapter 3.

¹¹⁹ "Secret. Proposal for the use of mines in an Anglo-German War in Support of an Offensive Strategic Plan.", DOD, Captain G.A. Ballard, February 6, 1913, ADM 116/3412, pp. 1-3.

a limited mine field could prove “very extensive.” Two minefield could be laid within two days of a declaration of war against Germany. The first (M1) would be laid across the Dover Straits from the South East Goodwin buoy to the Outer Ruytingen Shoal. It would stop all trade bound for German, Dutch, Belgian and Danish ports via the Channel and provide a “formidable barrier” to German fleets or cruisers attempting to get past Dover. The M1 design was actually adopted during the war as part of the Dover Barrage but was largely unsuccessful in preventing the passage of German submarines through the English Channel.¹²⁰ A second barrier (M2), at right angles eastward of the Terschelling Light Vessel would block vessels moving along the Dutch coast. Some 2,400 mines would be required for both operations. A third option, mining the Kattegat, was only possible if Russia were allied with Britain and gave its assent.¹²¹

The DOD’s plan gained the War Staff’s and Board’s provisional approval in April 1913. Orders delivered to Callaghan and the Senior Officer commanding the Navy’s minelaying squadron, Captain Bonham, in December 1913-early January 1914, indicated that the Admiralty viewed Ballard’s proposal as a supplement to the distant blockade.¹²² It was, however, a limited gesture by the Admiralty and not as, one source claims, recognition that a large scale mine blockade of the Bight would be implemented on the outbreak of war.¹²³ The potentials of mine warfare were accepted by the Admiralty but a wholesale commitment to offensive mine laying remained a relatively low priority. Increased attention did not translate into correlative funding, for the fiscal outlay on mines and related material remained consistent throughout 1911-1914.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Paul Halpern, *A Naval History of World War I*, (London, 1994), pp. 346, 349-50.

¹²¹ Ballard, “Proposals for the use of mines in an Anglo-German War...”, ADM 116/3412, pp. 3-9.

¹²² Admiralty to Callaghan, April 23, 1913, Letter M0033/13, ADM 116/3412; Jackson to Battenberg, April 5, 1913, DS/MISC/20/199, Battenberg MSS, IWM; Halvorsen, “Mines and Mine Warfare”, p. 88.

¹²³ Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, pp. 270-2.

¹²⁴ Halvorsen, “Mines and Mine Warfare”, pp. 87-9; Admiralty. “Future Plans for the British Fleet”, January 21, 1914, DS/MISC/20/277, Battenberg MSS; Mackay, p. 378.

Variations on the DOD's mining plans did, however, resurface during the war.¹²⁵

That Ballard's mining paper was accepted was a credit to his reputation in the Service given Churchill's dislike for the DOD. Ballard did not ingratiate himself with Churchill through his experienced critiques of the latter's offensive designs. The First Lord detested Ballard's forthrightness and was, by all appearances, resentful of his intellectual capabilities. In late 1913, Churchill unsuccessfully attempted to block the DOD's promotion to Rear-Admiral.¹²⁶ Ballard's mining plan proved, in fact, his "swan song" as an Admiralty planner. On 1st May 1914, he was appointed Admiral of Patrols in charge of safe-guarding the East Coast from raids and invasion, an anomaly considering that he had not yet become Rear-Admiral. He was replaced as DOD by Rear-Admiral Sir Arthur Leveson, Bayly's colleague on Churchill's pseudo planning staff.¹²⁷ Ballard remained Admiral of Patrols, with his command steadily reduced in size, until November 1915, when he was temporarily appointed Rear Admiral Commanding East Coast which terminated in May 1916. Re-employed as Admiral Superintendent at Malta in September 1916, he remained in that command until September 1919.¹²⁸ That Fisher did not recall Ballard to the War Staff when he again became Service chief in October 1914 is strange, given that Ballard's expertise could have aided the former's push for a Baltic campaign throughout late 1914-early 1915. Churchill's antipathy towards Ballard was the likely reason he was kept off the wartime staff. Even as one of the Admiralty's most influential pre-war planners departed the scene, (and maybe because of it) Churchill continued to push strategic designs

¹²⁵ One such proposal was Operation "ZZ", forwarded by the Second-in-Command Grand Fleet, Admiral Sir Charles Madden, in August 1917. "Blockade of Germany. Proposals of Admiral Second in Command (Grand Fleet) for Operation 'ZZ'.", August 7, 1917, ADM 137/1936. Madden's proposition will be examined in the next chapter.

¹²⁶ Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, p. 266.

¹²⁷ G.A. Ballard, "Record of business, letters, etc.", Entry for May 1, 1914, MS80/200, Ballard Mss; *Naval Staff*, Appendix B., p. 122.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, Entries for: October 12, 1914; January 1915; October 29, 1915; November 6, 1915; May 1, 1916; July 7, 1916; September 27, 1916; Ballard, *Black Battlefleet*, p. 9; Halpern, *A Naval History*, pp. 24, 35.

developed, but later dismissed by Ballard and others, right up until August 1914.

Despite the War Staff's condemnations, the First Lord remained transfixed by the lure of the eastern North Sea littoral. On the eve of the war, he resuscitated Bayly's designs despite adverse opinion both within and outside the Admiralty. The first step involved an attempt to revive the stillborn 1905 CID combined operational sub-committee.¹²⁹ The project was again shelved, however, with the outbreak of the war and the CID being placed into "a state of suspended animation" by the government.¹³⁰ Admiralty correspondence with the Home Fleet also denoted a return to offensive North Sea proposals. Drafts of new War Plans/Orders communicated to Callaghan on 15th June recapitulated aspects of Churchill-Bayly's recommendations: an offensive drive into the Bight (designated Plan M), a close flotilla blockade of the Bight (Plan L.a.), the same with an advanced base at Borkum or Sylt (Plan L.b.), and the establishment of a base near Stavanger to control the Skaw (Plan T).¹³¹ The C-in-C's remarks on these proposals were, as to be expected, neither complimentary nor supportive.¹³² Inquires from the new DOD, Leveson, to the War Staff's Director Intelligence Division (DID), Rear-Admiral Henry Oliver, attempted to clarify existing navigational questions associated with inshore operations off the German North Sea estuaries, Heligoland, and Sylt.¹³³ This activity culminated in Churchill's 31st July letter to the Prime Minister enclosing Bayly's June 1913 advanced base reports. To facilitate military and naval cooperation, the First Lord advocated separate studies of each report from the War

¹²⁹ COS (Acting) Vice-Admiral F.C.D. Sturdee to First Lord and First Sea Lord, "Plans for Combined Offensive Action on the Outbreak of War.", July 21, 1914, ADM 1/8386/213, Plans for Combined Offensive Action on the Outbreak of War. Proposed Reconstitution of the Sub-Committee of the CID.

¹³⁰ Roskill, *Hankey*, p. 140.

¹³¹ Jackson to C-in-C Home Fleet, Re: draft of new War Plans and War Orders, June 15, 1913, ADM 116/3096, Case 0030.

¹³² Remarks of C-in-C Home Fleet on draft of proposed new War Plans/Orders, June 23, 1914, *Ibid.*

¹³³ DOD to DID and COS War Staff, June 29, 1914, *Ibid.*

Office and Admiralty. The reports dealt with the establishment of bases at: Ameland Island or Born Deep, (Dutch coast between Texel and Borkum), Ekersund (southwestern Norway), Laeso Channel (Kattegat), Kungsbacka Fiord (southwestern Sweden), Esbjerg, Sylt, Borkum, and Heligoland.¹³⁴

Predictably, the War Staff again condemned these projects. Jackson deprecated Ameland's seizure as guaranteeing Holland's declaration of war against Britain. The protection of Born Deep would entail the British fleet being exposed to attacks from both the Dutch and Germans within the Borkum-Texel radius. Dutch coastal defence vessels, combined with German forces, would make Ameland's occupation, "a source of great anxiety, not commensurate with the slight gain in distance for our Flotillas if working off Heligoland."¹³⁵ The COS rejected the advanced base concept as exposing British covering forces to attack from seaward while defences were being erected to secure the base. Until a decisive fleet action settled the issue for Britain, these enterprises were "not worth the cost of the ships and men which must certainly take place in the operation."¹³⁶

The General Staff officer assigned to examine Bayly's schemes, Major Hereward Wake shared Jackson's doubts. Although an overseas base had aided Japan in 1904-05, those conditions could not be emulated on the islands selected by Bayly. Ameland was vulnerable to long-range artillery from the mainland. Seizing Scandinavian bases would necessitate a large force to deal with Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish armies intent on protecting their neutrality. Laeso Island could only serve as a temporary anchorage, while there were insufficient troops to deal with the fortifications at Esbjerg, Sylt, Borkum, and Heligoland. The objectives selected by Churchill did not fulfill the criteria of "whether the advantages to be gained are

¹³⁴ Churchill to Asquith, July 31, 1914, ADM 137/452.

¹³⁵ Report by COS, Admiral Sir Henry Jackson on: Borns Deep (Ameland Gat) as a temporary advanced base for a Flotilla.", August 1, 1914, ADM 137/452.

¹³⁶ *FDSF* v.2., pp. 180-1.

commensurate with the risks incurred.”¹³⁷

Following his appointment as Second-in-Command Grand Fleet and before his reluctant replacement of Callaghan on 3rd August 1914,¹³⁸ Vice-Admiral Sir John Jellicoe joined the opposition to the First Lord’s projected North Sea adventures. In a 27th July communique to the new COS, Vice-Admiral Sturdee, Jellicoe discounted a close blockade of the Bight as a legitimate method of protecting the BEF’s transport to France: “we shall gain our end with much less loss to ourselves, if we keep our forces nearer home instead of sending them off the German coast.” Regarding Bayly’s Borkum, Sylt, and Heligoland schemes, he echoed Wake and Jackson’s assessments:

I am not of the opinion that the advantages to be derived from the use of such a base are worth the cost in men and ships of capture. It is doubtful whether the Army could spare such men for such an attempt even if it were considered desirable, and I am distinctly of the opinion that the enterprise is not worth the sacrifices involved.¹³⁹

Aware of, and perhaps influenced, by Callaghan’s stance against Churchill’s offensive plans, Jellicoe was possibly comforted by the fact that the distant blockade was reconfirmed as the Grand (Home) Fleet’s primary strategy in early July.¹⁴⁰ Yet, that strategy was by no means assured on August 4, 1914. The war merely whet the First Lord’s appetite for more aggressive action against Germany. It is ironic, however, that the distant blockade’s lineage stemmed from the same offensive propositions forwarded by Wilson, Churchill, and his acolyte, Bayly: (i.e.) the NID’s pre-1909 operational studies. This strange dichotomy undermining the Navy’s strategic cohesiveness during 1911-1914 did not abate during the war. Influenced by wartime operational realities in

¹³⁷ Major Sir H. Wake, “Report on the Proposal to Occupy Certain Places as Temporary Naval Bases for Offensive Action Against Germany.”, August 11, 1914, ADM 137/452.

¹³⁸ See: Gordon, *Rules of the Game*, pp. 386-8, for an evaluation of Jellicoe’s mind set on succeeding Callaghan.

¹³⁹ Jellicoe to COS Admiralty, July 27, 1914, in A. T. Patterson (ed), *The Jellicoe Papers Volume 1., 1893-1916: Selections from the private and official correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Earl Jellicoe of Scapa*, (London, 1966), pp. 40-1.

¹⁴⁰ “War Orders. No. 1. (War With Germany)”, July 1, 1914, ADM 116/3096.

the North Sea, offensive themes developed in the 1890's and the Fisher regime remained serious considerations throughout 1914-18.

Chapter 7: Offensive Planning and Operational Realities, 1914-1918.

I.

Britain's declaration of war against Germany on 4th August 1914 did not appreciably alter the Royal Navy's strategic policy as it had evolved after 1911. Since there was no clear delineation between the distant blockade, as instituted in 1912, and offensive prewar plans, the Admiralty's unfolding wartime strategy appeared erratic and uncoordinated. Some have suggested that the Navy had no definitive plan at the war's outset and suffered a "continuing failure" to produce coordinated operational schemes afterwards. This was attributable to the lack of a proper staff system prior to the war, the half measures implicit in the War Staff's creation in 1911, and the espousal of individual causes by senior officers comprising the War Staff Group. The immediate prewar period established the Admiralty's wartime failings since there was "misplaced emphasis" on the distant blockade to defeat the High Seas Fleet rather than a concerted effort to disrupt Germany's economy.¹ This view is contentious given the above evidence and other sources which confirm that an economic strategy underpinned all prewar naval planning against Germany.² The widely accepted view is that, despite operational failings and the ensuing North Sea stalemate, the Navy's strategic policy was consistent and logical. Geographically and numerically, the distant blockade was the safest and surest method available to win the war in the North Sea. Offensively, through the enforced idleness of the High Seas Fleet, and defensively, by the strangulation of German trade, the Ballard-Dewar plan achieved the Admiralty's principal strategical aims.³ The underlying strategic question after August 1914 was,

¹ J. Goldrick, *The King's Ships Were at Sea: The War in the North Sea, August 1914-February 1915*, (Annapolis, 1984), pp. 311-2.

² Refer to Chapters 2, 4, and 6, above; Offer, *First World War*.

³ P. Kennedy, "Britain in the First World War" in A. R. Millet and W. Murray (eds), *Military Effectiveness, Volume One: The First World War*, (London, 1988), p. 39; op cit., *British Naval Mastery*, Chapter 9; *FDSF*, v.2., pp. 3-4.

could the Navy maintain its stranglehold on the North Sea and still employ the strategy identified in Corbett's study of the Seven Years War (i.e. peripheral assaults on the Continent), to expedite Germany's defeat?⁴

Two factors explain the Admiralty's approach to the challenges of war. Operational planning was dictated by the dominance of the mine and submarine in the North Sea. As predicted by Callaghan, Jellicoe, Fisher, and even Wilson, the Grand Fleet's predominance ended slightly north of the Heligoland Bight and west of the Skagerrak. And still, the Admiralty's strategic policy retained the offensive concept determined by history, tradition, and planning developed during the late Victorian period. Although the blockade's "historical panacea" remained constant throughout 1914-18⁵, it too was ultimately part of the same process begun nearly thirty years earlier. When Fisher and Churchill re-inaugurated 1902-09 contingencies against Germany in 1914-15, they were maintaining the axiom endemic throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the decisive projection of naval strength against an enemy's most strategically (and economically) vulnerable points. While the Admiralty's strategic course appeared disjointed, in actuality, both the distant blockade and offensive Baltic-North Sea proposals were byproducts of plans developed in the late 1880's-1890's. Ill-defined and vague, the Royal Navy, nonetheless, had a strategic doctrine in place at the war's outset.

The wartime offensive designs continued planning established by Custance, Ballard, Hankey, Ottley, and Fisher at the turn of the twentieth century, and were the last installments in the trend first created by the NID to meet a perceived Dual Alliance naval threat. Churchill's push for an advanced base along the eastern North Sea littoral, Wilson's Heligoland obsession, and Fisher's Baltic campaign, continued themes constructed, tested, and consistently reconsidered after 1887. Fisher's second term as First Sea Lord and his controversial "Baltic Project", warrants a re-examination since

⁴ Corbett, *Seven Years War*, 2 Volumes. (1907).

⁵ Goldrick, *King's Ships*, p. 312.

it was a paradigm of the strategic trend established in the late nineteenth century. A wartime procurement policy similar to those begun in the 1890's and 1906-08 to meet specific requirements under the 1907-08 Admiralty War Plans, link the pre and post 1914 plans and legitimise Fisher's propositions.

Even the post-Dardanelles environment could not quash revived prewar offensive plans. The German U-boat threat in 1917-18, became the catalyst for contingencies akin to close mine blockade and blocking plans developed by the NID and its alumni throughout 1904-1913. Excepting Arthur Marder, others have either overlooked or excluded operational contingencies, such as Operation "ZZ" (July 1917), designed to seal the North Sea and Baltic exits to the passage of German submarines. Consequently, their significance in the Admiralty's prewar and wartime strategic development has been ignored.⁶ In many respects, the April 1918 Zeebrugge-Ostend Raids were the culmination of the trend begun in the NID three decades earlier. Foibles aside, the prewar offensive projects resurrected during the war still retained a strategic flexibility designed to best utilise the Navy's traditional strengths decisively against Germany.

II.

The conflict was scarcely a week old when it became evident that Churchill's desire for an offensive continued to dominate the Admiralty's strategic agenda. He remained transfixed by the advanced base/close blockade proposals first formulated by Rear-Admiral Bayly's planning group in early 1913. By 9th August, Churchill was bombarding the new COS, Vice-Admiral F.C.D. Sturdee (July-November 1914), and Battenberg with his favourite project to seize Ameland and Born Deep as an advanced flotilla base for: "a close observation and control of the Southern approaches to the Elbe." Supported by the Channel Fleet, 3000 Marines, 9 cruisers, 4 destroyer flotillas, 3 river monitors, and 18 submarines (6 "E" Class, 12 "C" Class) would take the island. Reminiscent of themes from the 1890's later detailed in the 1904-08 war plans, seizing

⁶ *FDSF v.4.: 1917: Year of Crisis*, Chapter 9; Halpern, *Naval History*; Bond, "British War Planning", pp. 107-38.

Ameland/Born Deep might tempt out the High Seas Fleet, allow British aerial observation of the Bight, establish a submarine base in the Bight, or facilitate an attack on the Kiel Canal. These remained, however, secondary considerations to the need to “maintain in full vigour the spirit of enterprise and attack....” which the operation entailed by taking the action to the Germans.⁷ Critical of Churchill’s “harum scarum” North Sea projects,⁸ the ADOD, Captain Richmond, repeated the former COS’s, Jackson, earlier appraisals of the Ameland plan. Besides its “strategical & tactical futility”, the island’s seizure might alienate Holland and the Cape Dutch and lead to Japanese moves against the Dutch East Indies which would not sit well with Australia. Ameland’s harbour could not even accommodate a force capable of doing appreciable damage. Holding it would be a source of “constant anxiety”, incommensurate with the lives and ships lost in the process.⁹

Churchill’s fixation with Germany’s North Sea littoral was not the only offensive option to emerge in the first month of the war. He forwarded the outline of a Baltic campaign to the Russians in mid-August. With Asquith’s approval, he had approached the C-in-C of the Russian Army, Grand Duke Nicholas, on 19th August, stating that British command of the Baltic was not insurmountable but contingent on two factors: (1) the High Seas Fleet’s defeat; (2) a successful attack on the Kiel Canal. The first could occur at any time, while the second could be accomplished by a destroyer/air attack on the Brunsbüttel locks; a provision outlined in the NID’s July 1904 Elbe study, by Wilson in 1905 and 1907, War Plan C/C1, and Bayly in June 1913. Success in either endeavour could allow a British fleet to enter the Baltic. Establishing naval superiority, the fleet “could carry, convoy, and land” Russian troops for three operations: outflanking German armies holding the Danzig-Thorn line, attacking Berlin from the north, or an assault on Kiel and the Canal to drive out the German fleet if in

⁷ “Minute of First Lord on proposed advanced Flotilla Base at Mouth of Elbe”, August 9, 1914, ADM 137/452.

⁸ Richmond Diary, August 14, 1914, *Portrait*, p. 99.

⁹ Diary, August 9, 1914, *Ibid.*, p. 96.

the Baltic--options mirroring Fisher and Wilson's 1904-05 Schleswig-Holstein/Pomeranian plans. Agreeing in principle with the proposed operations as "quite feasible and fully expedient", the Russians only promised cooperation if the general military situation "lend itself to its application."¹⁰ The Masurian Lakes and Tannenberg disasters (August 27-30th) ensured, however, that Russian military participation in any future Baltic campaign was dubious even after Fisher's return to the Admiralty in late 1914.¹¹

Another prewar offensive proposal was tabled after the Ameland plan. As an "unofficial" advisor attached to the new War Staff Group established in August, Admiral Sir A.K. Wilson reanimated his 1911 Heligoland project. Viewed as impracticable, the island's capture had been denounced by the Ballard Committee, Home Fleet C-in-C's, and even Bayly throughout 1907-1913. Jellicoe too found the plan abhorrent.¹² True to character, Wilson continued to believe that the island could be taken and presented Churchill with a detailed operational plan in mid-September. Recognising the "sound general principle" that ships should not be risked against fortifications, recent improvements in range-finding and fire control made an attack on Heligoland feasible. Sixteen pre-dreadnoughts in five separate groups would neutralise the island's gun emplacements--each group preceded by minesweepers during their bombardment runs. Once the fortifications and German naval craft were destroyed, a battalion-strength landing party would establish a garrison. While the Grand Fleet covered the expedition forty miles north-west of Heligoland, British destroyer/submarine pickets off the North Sea estuaries would guard against submarines and/or the High Seas Fleet. In British hands, the island would facilitate command of the Bight and provide an effective watch on all German naval movements via the Jade, Elbe, and Canal. Heligoland's defence would be accomplished by a mine blockade and

¹⁰ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis Volume 2.*, (London, 1923), pp. 23-4.

¹¹ Halpern, p. 106.

¹² *FDSF* v.2., pp. 182-3.

submarine “watch” on the German estuaries, and a small garrison equipped with machine guns and a few 4 or 6-inch guns.¹³ Wilson’s proposal repeated the central premise behind his 1910-11 close blockade strategy--preventing the egress of German submarines into the North Sea.¹⁴ A growing realisation of that threat by senior fleet officers would negate Wilson and Churchill’s hopes for an early naval offensive against Germany.

At a 17th September strategic conference at Loch Ewe, Wilson’s plan and Churchill’s Baltic proposal were reviewed as part of the Grand Fleet’s general North Sea policy.¹⁵ Unanimously, the assembled flag officers opposed the Heligoland project. The 2nd Battle Squadron commander, Vice-Admiral Sir George Warrender, ruled out naval gunfire against the forts. Land defences had the range “too easily” while naval spotting was difficult on the flat, featureless island. Rear-Admiral Sir Charles Madden, Grand Fleet COS, concurred with Warrender’s assessment, emphasising that the difficulties of eliminating the island’s deep gun emplacements, combined with the “great danger” posed by German submarines, rendered the plan unworkable. Even Vice-Admiral Bayly (commanding 1st Battle Squadron), agreed that the margins were “too narrow” to risk the Grand Fleet near Heligoland and doubted the mine blockade’s effectiveness on the German estuaries. Jellicoe’s summation that: “the reduction of Heligoland would involve far more serious losses in capital ships than would compensate for any advantage gained,”, settled the matter for all present, including

¹³ Wilson to Churchill, “The Capture of Heligoland”, September 10, 1914, (8 pps.), ADM 116/1350, 1914-1918 War Operations and Policy. Naval and Military. Case 5863. Volume 3.

¹⁴ Refer to Chapter 6 above; Lambert, *Naval Revolution*, pp. 205-11.

¹⁵ Attending the conference were: Churchill; the COS, Vice-Adm. F.C.D. Sturdee; the DID, Rear-Adm. H.F. Oliver; Admiralty Secretary, Sir W. G. Greene; C-in-C Grand Fleet, Adm. Sir J. Jellicoe; COS Grand Fleet, Rear-Adm. Sir C. Madden; Vice-Adm. Sir L. Bayly, 1st Battle Squadron; Vice-Adm. Sir C. Warrender, 2nd Battle Squadron; Vice-Adm. Sir E. Bradford, 3rd Battle Squadron; Vice-Adm. Sir D. Gamble, 4th Battle Squadron; Commodore (S), R. Keyes; Commodore (T), R. Tyrwhitt. *FDSF* v.2., pp. 8-15; Patterson (ed), *Jellicoe Papers* v.1., p. 69.

the First Lord and War Staff representatives.¹⁶

Churchill's Baltic proposition was also rejected by the Grand Fleet hierarchy. As the only dissenter, Bayly supported the plan since it included operational designs that he had drafted in June 1913. He again promoted a destroyer attack against the Brunsbüttel locks to seal the Canal's western exit and a cruiser-flotilla attack on Kiel harbour as preliminaries to a move through the Belts. Commodore (T) Reginald Tyrwhitt, commanding Harwich Force, refuted Bayly's exposition. Besides the navigational difficulties in the Elbe, the Canal locks comprised two gates: the outer gate would have to be smashed first to get at the inner--a daunting task under heavy defensive fire. Tyrwhitt viewed an attack on Kiel harbour as equally prohibitive given the threat posed by German mines, submarines, and destroyers. It was not advisable to risk a reduction in naval force by "eccentric movements" such as a direct assault on Kiel. Accordingly, the assembly concluded that a Baltic campaign was infeasible until two fleets, each strong enough to deal with the High Seas Fleet, were available to operate off the German North Sea coast and pass through the Belts.¹⁷ A proposal similar to Bayly's was aired by Captain W.W. Fisher (commanding HMS *St. Vincent*, 1st Battle Squadron) in February 1915, for a "Copenhagen" style attack on the High Seas Fleet in Schillig Roads. Not surprisingly, it was rejected by Jellicoe for the same reasons presented above.¹⁸ The Churchill-Bayly prescriptions, however, still retained the valid premise established in previous operational studies on the Baltic, from the NID's July 1904 war plan to Admiralty War Plans C-D and W.3., that Germany's North Sea egresses had to be eliminated before an offensive against German strategic/economic assets in the Baltic.

The Loch Ewe decisions were not surprising considering the unfolding realities

¹⁶ Memorandum by Jellicoe on General Policy discussed at Loch Ewe, September 17, 1914, ADM 116/1350; Jellicoe to Admiralty Secretary, September 24, 1914, in *Jellicoe Papers v. 1.*, pp. 68-9.

¹⁷ Jellicoe Memorandum, Sept. 17, 1914, ADM 116/1350; *Jellicoe Papers, v. 1.*, p. 69

¹⁸ Jellicoe to the Secretary of the Admiralty, February 23, 1915, *Jellicoe Papers v. 1.*, p. 146; *FDSF v. 2.*, pp. 414-5.

of naval war in the North Sea. The potential of the mine and submarine were demonstrated by the loss of the light cruisers HMS *Amphion* and *Pathfinder* on 4th August and 5th September. Jellicoe's intense caution, his fears over the safety of Scapa Flow and other East Coast bases, his 1st September decision to move the fleet to western Scotland, and the edict that the Grand Fleet's "sweeps" remain north of Latitude 57°N were soon vindicated.¹⁹ Five days after the Loch Ewe conference, U-9 rapidly sank the armoured cruisers *Aboukir*, *Cressy*, and *Hogue* off the Dutch coast with the loss of over 1,400 officers and ratings. The postmortem has been succinctly stated: "The submarine had now eclipsed the High Sea Fleet as the greatest threat to the Royal Navy's control of the seas."²⁰ The sinking of the cruiser HMS *Hawke* on 15th October, prompted Jellicoe to move the Grand Fleet westwards to the northern Irish coast. Additional losses, such as the new dreadnought HMS *Audacious* sunk by a mine off Loch Swilly on the 27th October, and the seaplane carrier HMS *Hermes* torpedoed on the 31st, led to an alteration in the Grand Fleet's tactics (large cruiser/destroyer screens) with Jellicoe accorded complete autonomy to use all bases outside the North Sea. By the end of the year, German *Kleinkrieg* tactics to reduce British superiority via the mine and torpedo had demolished prewar conceptions of what a North Sea surface war actually entailed.²¹ But still, the push for inshore and amphibious operations along the German littoral continued.

III.

On 28th October 1914, Admiral Prince Louis of Battenberg formally resigned as First Sea Lord. Despite unfair denunciations of his German birth in the press,

¹⁹ Halpern, pp. 24, 29-30; Goldrick, pp. 69-73; *FDSF* v.2., pp. 64-7; *Jellicoe Papers* v.1., pp. 45-6, 50-1, 67-8, 71-2.

²⁰ Halpern, p. 33; Goldrick, pp. 120-2, 123-35; *FDSF* v.2., pp. 55-9; J. Corbett, *History of the Great War: Naval Operations Volume I.*, (London, 1920-31), pp. 163, 165, 172-7.

²¹ Churchill to Jellicoe, October 8, 1914 and Jellicoe to the Secretary of the Admiralty, October 30, 1914, Patterson (ed), *Jellicoe Papers* v.1., pp. 73-7; Corbett-Newbolt, *Naval Operations* v.1. pp. 239-46; Halpern, pp. 33-4, 37-8; Admiral of the Fleet Earl Jellicoe of Scapa, *The Grand Fleet, 1914-16: Its Creation, Development, and Work*, (London, 1919), pp. 149-52; *FDSF* v.2., pp. 67-70, 74-7; Goldrick, pp. 138-42.

Battenberg's lethargic approach to operational matters had placed him in a untenable position. Under Cabinet criticism for his own erratic handling of the war, the First Lord had a convenient scapegoat in Battenberg and suggested the latter's resignation.²² Churchill's decision to re-install the seventy-three year old Fisher was equally controversial. King George V and senior officers such as the DID, Oliver (replaced Sturdee as COS in November), had serious misgivings about the appointment. Fisher gave little indication that his energy, drive, and determination had lapsed since 1910. Days after his reappointment, he implemented a massive building program associated with potential offensive projects in the North Sea.²³ Buoyed by Fisher's presence, Churchill advocated Borkum's seizure as a successor to the defunct Ameland proposal--a design ultimately aimed at securing naval control in the Baltic.

Churchill's Borkum-Baltic theme was tabled after the Loch Ewe conference. Writing to Jellicoe, he stressed that Germany's "wise policy" of declining battle ensured their control of the Baltic and gave them the "immense advantage" of threatening the Russian flank, protecting their coast, and drawing supplies (i.e. iron-ore) from Sweden and Norway. Consequently, "It is to secure the eventual command of the Baltic that British naval operations must tend." This could be accomplished through: the High Seas Fleet's defeat, breaking the Canal, or an effective blockade of the Bight. Churchill hoped the C-in-C would study the best method to pass into the Baltic "when the time arrived."²⁴ The newly formed War Council likewise supported a western North Sea offensive. In early December, Arthur Balfour, Conservative representative on the Council, forwarded a memorandum to Maurice Hankey, now War Council Secretary, advocating an advanced base for submarines and flotillas as "the most effective way of crippling the movements of the enemy's fleet, and parrying any attempt at invasion." The

²² Lambert, "Battenberg" in *First Sea Lords*, pp. 84-6; *FDSF* v.2., pp 82-9;

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-91, 93-4; Mackay, pp. 459-68; Halpern, p. 36

²⁴ Churchill to Jellicoe, October 8, 1914, Jellicoe MSS, Volume 2, 48990, 1908-1915, British Library.

paper gave Churchill added impetus to put his case to the Prime Minister.²⁵

Late December memoranda sent to Asquith and Fisher incorporated the outline of Churchill's Borkum-Baltic proposal. British command of the Baltic could be secured by May 1915 and would create two new fronts: Berlin and the Kiel Canal. Borkum's capture and an intensive mine blockade of the German North Sea estuaries were the opening preliminaries. The High Seas Fleet's exclusion from the Bight would facilitate an invasion of Schleswig-Holstein and advance on the Kiel Canal, further paralysing the movements of the German fleet. With British forces established in Schleswig-Holstein, Denmark could be encouraged to join the Allies with the incentive of a postwar restoration of her lost provinces. With this support, Britain could occupy Fyen and secure the Great Belt. A strong fleet might then be passed into the Baltic to cut Germany off "from all northern supplies." The final stage involved Russian troops landing in Pomerania within striking distance of Berlin, immobilizing large German concentrations. As the overture, Borkum's capture was an "indispensable measure" for securing British flotilla superiority in the Bight and enticing a general fleet action.²⁶

By early 1915, Churchill touted the Borkum scenario as the Admiralty's most viable strategic option. Writing to Fisher on 4th January that "Borkum is the key to all Northern possibilities", the operation would prevent raids, block the North Sea exits, and facilitate an invasion of either Oldenburg or Schleswig-Holstein. He urged that preparations be made to attack "at the earliest moment."²⁷ The First Lord attempted to convince Jellicoe that, combined with an active mining policy against the German rivers, Borkum could become "the most dreaded lair of submarines in the world". Thirty "B" and "C" Class submarines supported by two destroyer flotillas and a squadron of

²⁵ Memorandum by Arthur J. Balfour to Hankey, December 3, 1914, ADM 116/1350; *FDSF* v.1., pp.184-5.

²⁶ Churchill to Asquith, December 29, 1914 in *The World Crisis* v.2., pp. 44-5; Churchill to Asquith, December 31, 1914 in Gilbert, *Churchill Companion Volume 3*, pp. 348-9; Churchill to Fisher, December 21, 22, 1914, *FGDN* v.3., pp. 105, 107; *FDSF* v.2., pp. 185-6.

²⁷ Churchill to Fisher, January 4, 1914, *FGDN* v.3., p. 121.

pre-dreadnoughts would secure British predominance in the Bight. Repeating his prewar “moral superiority” argument, Borkum’s seizure was “the only aggressive policy which gives the Navy its chance to apply its energy and daring and in six weeks of fierce flotilla warfare we could beat the enemy out of the North Sea altogether.”²⁸ In principle, Fisher supported the plan as it corresponded with his own proposals for a future Baltic campaign. Together, he and Churchill persuaded Asquith on the plan’s merits and gained the War Council’s approval on 7th January to begin operational planning for an April-May attack. Their presentation even convinced the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, to set aside a division for the assault.²⁹

Fisher’s confidence in the First Lord’s projects was, however, circumspect when they contradicted his strategic views--a reality later confirmed during the Dardanelles debacle. Responding to Churchill’s 4th January memorandum, he agreed that Borkum offered great possibilities but added: “it’s a purely military question whether it can be held.” The Admiralty’s first priority remained: “to conserve our naval superiority over the Germans and in no wise jeopardize it by minor operations whose cumulative effect is to wear out our vessels and incur losses in ships and men.”³⁰ Two weeks later he informed Churchill: “I have no wish whatever to cold-douche any projects for our being troublesome to the enemy....But I desire to emphasise the necessity of sticking to the enemy’s vitals!”³¹ By this stage the “vitals” were the Baltic and the High Seas Fleet. Privately, Fisher told Richmond that he “didn’t intend to have the Borkum business done.”³² His correspondence with Jellicoe during the same period also suggest a distaste

²⁸ Churchill to Jellicoe, January 4, 11, 1914, Jellicoe MSS, Volume 2, 48990, 1908-1915, British Library; Churchill to Jellicoe, January 18, 1915, in Patterson, *Jellicoe Papers*, v.1., pp. 124-5.

²⁹ Meeting of the War Council: extract from Secretary’s notes, January 7, 1915 in Gilbert, *Churchill Companion Volume 3*, pp. 389-90; Churchill, *World Crisis* v.2., pp. 26-7; Halpern, p. 103.

³⁰ Fisher to Churchill, January 4, 1915, *FGDN* v.3., pp. 121-2.

³¹ Fisher to Churchill, January 18, 1915, *Ibid.*, p. 132. Also refer to Mackay, pp. 456-7, for Fisher’s growing disenchantment with the Borkum proposal.

³² R. Prior, *Churchill’s World Crisis as History*, (London, 1983), p. 53; Hayes, “Admiralty’s Plans”, pp. 113-4.

for Churchill's offensive policies.³³ The C-in-C had already rejected Borkum's seizure in his July 1914 critique of Bayly's Plan L.(b)., as an "enterprise....not worth the sacrifices involved."³⁴ Alluding to the growing confluence of Churchill's Borkum and Fisher's Baltic schemes, a frustrated Jellicoe complained: "I fear we are suffering badly from (1) No policy. (2) Too many cooks. (3) Amateur strategists. But one must do his best."³⁵

Concurrent with Borkum, Churchill promoted taking Sylt as an advanced base. Like Borkum, this operation had been detailed in Slade's "Preamble" to the 1907 War Plans, Plans W.2.-W.3. from 1908, and Bayly's June 1913-July 1914 investigations. Based on the latter, Churchill forwarded his proposal in early December 1914. An attack would be launched from Sylt's northern end by a bombarding force (A) consisting of 4 older pre-dreadnoughts, 3 Monitors, and 20 destroyers, covered by the Grand Fleet, "within supporting distance". Once the enemy guns were silenced, a landing force (B) comprising 5000 troops would take the island, supported by the naval elements moving into Lister Deep to dominate the mainland approaches to Sylt and Rom Island to the north. A defence force (C) of 10 "C" Class submarines, 40 destroyers, seaplane carriers, and 6 gunboats/sloops based on Lister Deep could make the base "self-contained & self-supporting" against attempted recapture. The creation of a naval/air base would allow regular observation and effective control over the Heligoland Bight's debouches.³⁶ Churchill's Naval Secretary, Commodore Charles de Bartolomé, doubted the venture given the island's strong defences. Even if naval bombardment neutralised German batteries, a British landing would encounter heavy opposition from

³³ Fisher to Jellicoe, January 11th and 19th, 1915, *FGDN* v.3., p. 127, 133.

³⁴ Jellicoe to COS, Admiralty, July 27, 1914; *Jellicoe Papers*, v.1., pp. 40-1.

³⁵ Jellicoe to C-in-C Home Fleet, Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander Bethell, January 22, 1915, *Ibid.*, p. 128.

³⁶ "Memorandum by First Lord for an Attack on Sylt", December 2, 1914, ADM 137 452.

well prepared defensive positions and an armoured train.³⁷ Bartolomé's apprehensions were not without foundation for the German Admiralty Staff, aware of British designs on Borkum, Sylt, and the Elbe, had strengthened their North Sea defences between 1905 and 1914.³⁸

By now an established pattern, Churchill ignored Bartolomé's concerns and earlier War Staff condemnations of the Borkum-Sylt proposals. He sent another minute on Sylt to the War Staff Group on 3rd January 1915. Stressing that the Staff draft "the best plan possible", preparations should be made to implement the operation on either 1st March or 5th April. Addenda to the December 1914 outline included ordering "necessary appliances" such as monitors, armour-plated landing boats, and smoke-laying devices. Utilising aerial and cross spotting, the bombardment squadron could subdue fire from the German batteries sufficiently to allow transports to approach under darkness and smoke to disembark between 8,000-12,000 troops and support the infantry attack. German counter-attacks would be eliminated by "bottling-up" the High Seas Fleet behind Heligoland with 40 British submarines ("B"- "E" classes) during the day and 60 destroyers from the 1st Fleet Flotillas at night. The Grand Fleet would lie in support near the 56th Parallel. Minefields, indicator nets, and destroyers with towed charges would protect the landing/bombardment forces from submarine attack. The entire operation could succeed within three days through, "A resolve to have the island at all costs, coupled with exact and careful preparations."³⁹

Churchill's Borkum-Sylt schemes dissipated for several reasons. HMS *Formidable's* loss on 1st January and Bayly's subsequent removal as Channel Fleet C-in-C, eliminated his support for the proposals at a critical juncture. Bayly had been purposely transferred from the Grand Fleet in December to command the Borkum attack. Second, the onset of the Dardanelles operation removed a vital material

³⁷ Undated paper by Commodore Bartolomé, *Ibid*; *FDSF* v.2., p. 187.

³⁸ Hayes, "Admiralty's Plans", pp.114-16; Chapter 4 above, footnotes 33, 52, 58.

³⁹ Minute by First Lord on the Capture of Sylt to Admiralty Secretary, First Sea Lord, Sir Arthur Wilson, COS., January 3, 1915, ADM 137/452.

component from the plans when Channel Fleet pre-dreadnoughts were redeployed to the Mediterranean in February-March 1915.⁴⁰ Ultimately, Churchill's failure to win over senior flag and staff officers to his concepts ensured their demise. The unyielding attempts to impose his "hasty & crude ideas" on the Admiralty staff were self-defeating, frustrating, and highlighted his amateurism in naval strategy.⁴¹ Reiterating prewar assessments, the COS, Oliver, and the ADOD, Richmond, demolished the Borkum-Sylt proposals. Oliver observed that apart from its heavy defences, Borkum's sandy composition meant that only direct hits on the German batteries would be effective. Bombardment of its defences was hampered by off-lying shoals and the island's mined approaches. Juist, to the northeast, would also have to be taken as artillery mounted there could easily range on Borkum.⁴² Given one of Churchill's drafts to plan the operation, Richmond's unofficial reaction revealed the War Staff's frustration. An attack on Borkum:

is *quite mad*. The reasons for capturing it are NIL, the possibilities about the same. I have never read such an idiotic, amateur piece of work as this outline in my life. Ironically enough it falls to me to prepare the plans for this stupendous piece of folly....It remains with the Army, who I hope will refuse to throw away 12,000 troops in this manner for the self-glorification of an ignorant & impulsive man.⁴³

Richmond's official memorandum gave a more detailed appraisal of the scheme's implausibility. Persistent haze and indiscernible natural features on the island impeded effective spotting and range finding. Unproven aerial spotting, hidden German batteries, mines, and navigational impediments caused by sandbanks/shoals all negated an effective bombardment of Borkum's defences. Under existing hydrographic conditions, smokescreens were impractical and would only impede the bombardment and

⁴⁰ *FDSF* v.2., p. 188 and 98-100; Dewar, *Navy From Within*, pp. 166-9; Churchill, *World Crisis* v.2., p. 29; Goldrick, pp. 229-37.

⁴¹ Richmond Diary, September 10, 1914, *Portrait*, p. 107.

⁴² Memorandum by COS on Capture of Borkum, December 15, 1914, ADM 137/452.

⁴³ Richmond Diary, January 4, 1915, *Portrait*, pp. 134-5.

disembarkation of troops.⁴⁴

Churchill's Borkum fixation continued despite the War Staff's opposition and the impending Dardanelles operation. On March 9th, he informed Jellicoe that preparations were proceeding for an attack on the island on or about May 15th, as new monitors ordered by Fisher were nearing completion. As an adjunct, he suggested that a "fast division" (*Queen Elizabeth* Class dreadnoughts, *Lion* Class battle cruisers, *Arethusa* Class cruisers, and "M" Class destroyers) be "passed into" the Baltic to contain the High Sea Fleet and cut Germany's Scandinavian supplies. Richmond dismissed the plan, as the force was too small to be an effective diversion and wholly unsuited for an attack on German trade. It was an "uneconomical use" of the *Queen Elizabeths'* fighting power.⁴⁵ The provision likely served as the archetype for Churchill's "Operation Catherine" in 1939-40, an operation viewed as unfeasible then as it was twenty-five years earlier.⁴⁶

Jellicoe still viewed the Borkum-Sylt proposals as anathema to maintaining British North Sea supremacy. Both islands were untenable as advanced bases due to their closeness to the German mainland. Holding them would risk the Grand Fleet in mine and submarine infested waters. The C-in-C never understood, "how an attack on Borkum could possibly assist fleet operations in the Baltic or lead to the German Fleet being driven altogether from the North Sea." As a prelude to a mine blockade or an invasion of Schleswig-Holstein, the plan was "ludicrous".⁴⁷ The former COS, Jackson, was equally blunt. Responding to a late March inquiry from Fisher on potential offensive proposals, Jackson believed the Borkum project justifiable only if it resulted

⁴⁴ H.W. Richmond, "Attack on Danzig (Borkum)", January 19, 1915, *Portrait*, pp. 138-9.

⁴⁵ Churchill to Jellicoe, March 9, 1915, Jellicoe MSS., Volume II., 48990, 1908-1915; H.W. Richmond, ADOD, "Considerations Affecting the Dispatch of 'Queen Elisabeth' Class to the Baltic", March 6, 1915, *Portrait*, pp.145-7; Richmond to Corbett, March 6, 1915 and Corbett to Richmond, March 7, 1915, Corbett MSS., MS82/006-MS81/143, Box 7, NMM.

⁴⁶ C. Barnett, *Engage the Enemy More Closely: The Royal Navy in the Second World War*, (London, 2000), pp. 93-6; Bond, "British War Planning", pp. 129-34.

⁴⁷ *FDSF* v.2., p. 190.

in the German Fleet's destruction. If meant as a diversion or prelude to other operations "further to the East", Borkum "had better be left alone".⁴⁸

Throughout, Fisher's questionable support was crucial for the implementation of the Borkum plan. Churchill certainly thought so, as he complained in *The World Crisis*:

But although the First Sea Lord's strategic conceptions were centred in the entry of the Baltic, and although he was in principle favourable to the seizure of Borkum as a preliminary, I did not find in him that practical, constructive and devising energy which in other periods of his career and at this period on other subjects he had so abundantly shown....He spoke a great deal about Borkum,....but he did not give that strong professional impulsion to the staffs necessary to secure the exploration of the plan.⁴⁹

Fisher never gave the Borkum scheme the "strong professional impulsion" it needed, because he had known since 1907 that the project was unfeasible, unnecessary, and detracted from what he viewed as the decisive theatre--the Baltic. Surprisingly, Fisher's familiarity with the Admiralty's 1907 War Plans has not been examined as a factor in his rejection of the Borkum scheme.⁵⁰ Churchill's lament discounts the fact that Fisher knew that Plan B/B1's Borkum scenario was merely an "example" to enhance the feasibility of the two primary plans in the series: Plan A, a distant blockade, and Plans C-D, a Baltic campaign. He had confirmed this in his 1908 War Plan "Commentary".⁵¹ Denunciations of the Borkum scheme by fleet and staff officers throughout 1913-15 validated that the Ballard Committee's assessments and Fisher's avoidance of the project were correct.

⁴⁸ Fisher to Jackson, March 30, and Minute by Jackson to Fisher, March 31, 1915, ADM 137/452.

⁴⁹ Churchill, *World Crisis* v.2., p. 27.

⁵⁰ For example see: *FDSF* v.2., pp. 184-91; Mackay, pp. 455-68, 471-5, 478-82; Halpern, pp. 102-5.

⁵¹ Refer to Chapters 3 and 4, above.

IV.

Evaluating Fisher's "Baltic Project" is problematic given his May 1915 resignation over the Dardanelles, and the historiographical conundrum caused by those trying to interpret the "true" intent of his strategic design. Fisher apparently utilised the Baltic as a "talking point" to deflect the First Lord's North Sea proposals. Fisher (and Churchill) doctored evidence to justify his contention before the Dardanelles Commission in 1916 that the Baltic plan was the main reason for his break with Churchill.⁵² Standard interpretations assign no such ulterior motives to Fisher's Baltic campaign but contend it was the predominate factor behind his opposition to the Dardanelles operation.⁵³ Neither argument, however, places Fisher's wartime proposals within the wider context of his prewar strategic musings, nor the offensive planning trend begun in the late 1890's. His prewar strategic views on deterrence and a strike at the enemy's vitals were encapsulated in the "Baltic Project". Like Wilson, Fisher and Churchill maintained that the North Sea stalemate could only be broken through a decisive projection of strength against Germany's vulnerable points--the axiom originating with the historical conceptions of Laughton and Colomb and codified in the NID's planning beginning in the late 1890's. Although Fisher and Churchill agreed over the "ends" of an offensive strategy (with the distant blockade), differences over the "means" of implementation created an irreparable rift in their relationship.

The origins of Fisher's wartime Baltic scheme are complicated since no detailed contingencies were completed nor can his and Churchill's memoirs be trusted as reliable interpretations.⁵⁴ It is certain that Fisher approached Julian Corbett in mid-December 1914 to prepare a memorandum on the topic. The completed draft, *On the possibility of using our Command of the Sea to influence more drastically the Military Situation of the Continent*, later entitled *The Baltic Project*, was returned on 19th December

⁵² Mackay, pp. 456-7, 459-65, 467-75.

⁵³ *FDSF* v.2., pp. 191-7.

⁵⁴ Mackay, p. 459-60, 462.

1914.⁵⁵ Comparing the current conflict to the Seven Years War, it amalgamated Fisher's favourite prewar amphibious themes and Corbett's credo on combined operations outlined in his 1907 study of the eighteenth century conflict.⁵⁶ Corbett's influence on Fisher, and the continuation of the Laughton-Colomb conceptions from the 1890's, was apparent in his collaboration on the First Sea Lord's "Baltic Project". Like 1907-08, and the concurrence of the historian's work on the CID's "Invasion" issue with the release of his *England in the Seven Years War*, the theme of utilising an offensive incentive to bring out an inferior enemy fleet was evident in Fisher's Baltic proposal. Corbett had reinforced this maxim in his theoretical treatise *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (1911), which examined historical examples of limited combined operations, advanced bases, offensive strikes, and "open" blockade as methods to achieve theatre dominance and maritime command over an enemy's sea and land forces (eg. the Russo-Japanese, Spanish-American, Crimean, Revolutionary/Napoleonic, Seven Years, and Anglo-Dutch Wars).⁵⁷

Since the "passive pressure" of the distant blockade may prevail, Fisher saw no need to change "the present scheme of naval operations." If, however, the blockade failed to work within a reasonable time frame the "possibility of bringing our Command of the Sea to bear more actively" would have to be considered. The alternative repeated the "fatal stroke of 1761" and the occupation of the Baltic: "*in such strength as to enable an adequate Russian army to land in the spring on the coast of Pomerania within striking distance of Berlin or so as to threaten the German communications eastwards!*" An operation on this magnitude required the entire battle fleet, leaving the North Sea open and British Baltic forces exposed to a German counter-stroke. Fisher's remedy was to sow the North Sea/Bight with mines on such a scale that "naval

⁵⁵ Corbett to Fisher, December 19, 1914, Corbett MSS. MS 82/006. Letters from Lord Fisher, 1903-1919, NMM; Schurman, *Corbett*, pp. 159-60.

⁵⁶ Corbett, *Seven Years War*, 2 Volumes (1907).

⁵⁷ J.S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, (London, 1911), pp. 31-2, 35-6, 52-6, 57-67, 73-83, 94-104, 137-9, 158-60, 162-4, 166-8, 185-210, 292-310.

operations in it would become impossible” even if it offended the neutrals. A chief concern was the danger to British communications once the fleet was in the Baltic. Any difficulties in securing an advanced Scandinavian base could be overcome by restricting British mining to a certain latitude.

The analogy of British Baltic operations during the Crimean War suggested that the “menace” of the plan might divert resources from other fronts and disturb the “German equilibrium”. It might force Germany into “desperate expedients” such as a fleet action in which the High Seas Fleet would be annihilated. Although the risks were serious, “*risks must be taken to use our Command of the Sea with greater energy....*” only if the distant blockade’s “passive pressure” was deemed not to be working.⁵⁸ Corbett had misgivings with the mining provision: “if it is possible for us to make the North Sea untenable with mines, is it not even more possible for the Germans to play the same game in the Baltic?”⁵⁹ Fisher, however, failed to revise the paper and remained evasive over mining the Bight as a precursor to a Baltic offensive--a factor some see as a “significant” indication that he was only semi-serious about the plan.⁶⁰

While agreeing on the desirability of a Baltic campaign, Churchill was vexed by Fisher’s insistence on a mining policy and his rebuff of the Borkum operation. In October 1914, he had vehemently opposed “ambush” and blockade mining because of insufficient mine stocks and the problems of maintaining fields in submarine dominated waters.⁶¹ In late December, he attempted to steer Fisher towards his reasoning over Borkum and the Baltic:

I am wholly with you about the Baltic,....But you must close up this side [North

⁵⁸ “The Baltic Project or On the possibility of using our Command of the Sea to influence more drastically the Military Situation on the Continent.”, ADM 116/3454, Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher-Miscellaneous Personal Papers Associated with his Resignation as First Sea Lord in 1915, Case 11522. The text of the memorandum is in Fisher’s *Records*, pp. 217-22.

⁵⁹ Corbett to Fisher, December 19, 1914, Corbett MSS, MS 82/006.

⁶⁰ Mackay, p. 473.

⁶¹ “Appendix D. Mining. Notes by the First Lord.”, October 18, 1914, Churchill, *World Crisis* v. 1., pp. 566-9; *FDSF* v. 2., pp. 79-81.

Sea] first. You must take an island and block them in, *a'la* Wilson; or you must break the Canal or the locks, or you must cripple his Fleet in a general action. No scattering of mines will be any substitute for these alternatives.⁶²

After Fisher's death, Churchill denigrated the lack of "a definite or coherent plan of action" and Fisher's caution over unnecessarily risking ships, expressing the conviction that: "he never seriously intended to dare the prolonged and awful hazards of the Baltic operation, but that he talked vaguely and impressively upon this project, which was in any case remote, with a view to staving off demands which he knew I should make upon him." Some view this as further proof that Fisher used the Baltic to stifle Churchill's ambitious proposals.⁶³ There is merit in this supposition for in late January 1915, Hankey told Corbett about Churchill's anger with the Baltic project as it was interfering with the Dardanelles scheme.⁶⁴ Other factors, however, support the contention that Fisher wanted a Baltic offensive as long as it conformed to the Admiralty's earlier war plans against Germany.

With the operational losses incurred since September 1914, Fisher was reticent about risking heavy units in the North Sea. By January 1915, his correspondence with Jellicoe paralleled the C-in-C's concerns over Grand Fleet sorties in submarine/mine infested waters.⁶⁵ This tempered Fisher's approach to offensive projects such as Borkum, but how far that applied to the Baltic remains unknown. Before the war, he was of two minds over the submarine's capabilities in "narrow waters" and the pursuit of inshore-amphibious operations.⁶⁶ In connection with the Baltic project, Fisher thought a mine blockade of the Bight was the safest option to close Germany's western

⁶² Churchill to Fisher, December 22, 1914, *FGDN* v.3., p. 107.

⁶³ W. Churchill, "Lord Fisher and his Biographer", *Great Contemporaries*, (London, 1941), pp. 300-2; Mackay, pp. 463-4.

⁶⁴ Schurman, *Corbett*, p. 160.

⁶⁵ Fisher to Jellicoe, December 23, 26, 27, 28, 1914, *Jellicoe Papers* v.1., pp. 114-7; Fisher to Jellicoe, January 4, 1915, *FGDN* v.3., p. 120.

⁶⁶ Refer to: Mackay, pp. 367-8.

North Sea exits.⁶⁷ His mine blockade variation was not a new concept. In 1905 the DNI, Ottley, had outlined a close mine blockade of the German North Sea estuaries while Ballard had advocated a similar proposal twice in September 1912 and February 1913.⁶⁸ Aware of Plan B/B1's intent, which had deprecated taking Borkum as a precondition to a Baltic descent, it is not unlikely that Fisher's mine blockade scenario was based on Ottley's and Ballard's earlier work. He was well aware of their planning abilities from their NID work and the Ballard Committee throughout 1905-07.

Churchill's postwar conviction that Fisher lacked a "definite or coherent plan of action" is circumspect considering the latter's knowledge of the NID's July 1904 plan, the Ballard Committee's Plans C-D, and War Plan W.3. from 1908, which all detailed Baltic operations. Moreover, Fisher had clearly outlined his proposal to mine the Bight as an attachment along with the Baltic paper in his response to Churchill's 4th January memorandum touting Borkum as "the key to all Northern possibilities." Warning that the Admiralty should conserve British naval superiority and avoid costly "minor operations", Fisher stated: *There is no option but to adopt an offensive mine laying policy.* Recognising the present deficiencies in mine stocks, he was confident that increased mine production and the introduction of faster minelayers meant that the policy could begin once the minefields were carefully selected.⁶⁹ The waning of Fisher's Baltic plan may have had as much to do with the dearth of mining *matériel* before 1917⁷⁰ as did his conflict with Churchill over strategic priorities.

A final point regarding the disparity between Fisher's and Churchill's strategic perceptions should be made. Fisher was clearly aware of the disadvantages of a Baltic campaign and, akin to his 1904-09 deterrence philosophy, advocated it only if the distant blockade proved ineffective. Despite Fisher's violent rhetoric, it was a provision

⁶⁷ Fisher, *Records*, pp. 228-30, 236-7.

⁶⁸ Refer to Chapter 2 and 6.

⁶⁹ Churchill to Fisher and Fisher to Churchill, January 4, 1915, enclosure "*MINE-LAYING*", *FGDN* v.3., pp. 121-3; Fisher, *Records*, pp. 237-9.

⁷⁰ *FDSF* v.1., pp. 77-8; Halpern, pp. 34, 344-5.

to be implemented after careful policy review and was not a Schlieffen-type alternative. That was clear within the *The Baltic Project's* text.⁷¹ Compare this reasoning to Churchill's promotion of the Borkum-Sylt-Heligoland Bight schemes throughout 1913-15 against all professional advice and balanced prewar studies. Although both men embraced a decisive strike against the enemy's vulnerable points, it is obvious which fully understood its relevance and limitations under actual war conditions.

Other factors curbed implementation of the Baltic plan. It assumed that successful combined operations could be launched against an industrially and militarily powerful nation such as Germany. According to Captain Alfred Dewar, who with his brother Kenneth were the dominant figures in the Admiralty's post-war Naval Historical Branch, this was entirely different from expeditions against an adversary's distant colonial possessions as envisioned in the pre-Entente war plans.⁷² Another flaw included the logistical/tactical difficulties of passing vessels through the "narrow and easily mined channels of the Belts". The COS, Oliver, believed that such an attempt "would have been madness." Fisher's inattention to these details escaped him: "How the fleet would pass the Great Belt in single line ahead with the German battle fleet deployed and crossing the T did not interest him, or how the fleet could be supplied in the Baltic."⁷³ Deficient fleet collier numbers and related logistical problems may have also impeded any move into the Baltic--far removed from the Grand Fleet's shore based facilities.⁷⁴ A third problem was that the possibility of a large Anglo-Russian Baltic expedition was remote considering the vast organisational difficulties involved and the dubious

⁷¹ Refer to Chapters 2 and 3, above for the meshing of Fisher's Baltic-deterrent theme with operational planning in the 1905-07 period.

⁷² *FDSF* v.2., p. 194; "Naval and Military Policy in the Event of War with France", July 1905, ADM 116/3111; *Anatomy*, Appendix II., pp. 550-68.

⁷³ Admiral Sir W. James, *A Great Seaman: The Life of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry F. Oliver*, (London, 1956), pp. 137-8.

⁷⁴ J. Sumida, "British Naval Operational Logistics, 1914-1918", *The Journal of Military History*, 57 (July 1993), pp. 466-8.

availability of Russian troops.⁷⁵

The only senior officer supportive of the Baltic plan was the C-in-C Dover Patrol (1915-17), Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon. He believed the concept might have provoked a general fleet action, with the Germans forced to meet the British in the Baltic, “in the face of a large fleet of submarines and of extensive and unknown minefields.” Marder concurs in this assessment which, at the very least, might have seriously weakened the High Seas Fleet.⁷⁶ Corbett too envisioned it as a potential “dramatic stroke” should the distant blockade prove insufficient to defeat Germany.⁷⁷

The most convincing, but not incontrovertible, evidence that Fisher was serious about the Baltic project was the building programme implemented in late 1914. As related in his memoirs, the inception of this “Armada” of 612 ships, “*intended for great projects in the Baltic and North Sea*”, occurred at the Admiralty on 3rd November 1914.⁷⁸ Like other aspects of the Baltic project, however, this inference is not that straightforward. The 3rd November meeting was concerned solely with the construction of 20 new submarines and not a Baltic fleet. Fisher altered the conference minutes to make it appear that the new vessels were destined for the Baltic to support his stance during the Dardanelles Commission in 1916. The Admiralty’s 1914-15 construction policy was orientated towards providing vessels for the Grand Fleet as much as it was Baltic operations.⁷⁹ This was the case regarding the first monitors ordered by Churchill in November which were intended primarily for Army support operations along the Belgian coast or a “Copenhagen” type attack on the High Seas Fleet.⁸⁰ The expanded

⁷⁵ *Naval Staff*, p. 68, NLMD; Bond, “British War Planning”, p. 120.

⁷⁶ Admiral Sir R. Bacon, *The Life of Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, Volume 2.*, (London, 1929), pp. 190-1; *FDSF* v.2., p. 195.

⁷⁷ Schurman, *Corbett*, p. 159.

⁷⁸ Fisher, *Memories*, pp. 86-90.

⁷⁹ Mackay, pp. 460-2.

⁸⁰ Churchill, *World Crisis* v.1., pp. 497-9.

monitor programme in December 1914 was likely only then being linked with a Baltic campaign.⁸¹ The same sequence is apparent in the construction of shallow draught battle cruisers. Fisher's enthusiasm to convert two of the projected *Revenge* Class dreadnoughts to battle cruisers (*Renown* and *Repulse*) was attributable to the type's success at the Falklands in early December and to bolster the Grand Fleet following the High Seas Fleet's "tip and run" raids on Yarmouth and Scarborough.⁸² By the end of the month the battle cruiser and Baltic concepts had fused. Writing to the Third Sea Lord (Controller), Rear-Admiral Frederick Tudor, Fisher alluded to Baltic operations as a determinant in the design of the two ships: "it is VITALLY IMPERATIVE for STRATEGIC REASONS to keep the *deep draught* UNDER 26 FEET!"⁸³

The merging of the Baltic project and procurement was solidified in late January 1915 when Churchill approved "the old man's children", the light battle cruisers, *Courageous* and *Glorious* (and later *Furious*).⁸⁴ Although their role was never defined, they were likely intended to provide fire support for landings or as bait to lure away German surface forces. Their shallow draught and speed indicated that they were designed to enter and operate in the Baltic, "through the international highway of the Sound."⁸⁵ Writing to Jellicoe in February 1916, Fisher lamented that he had hoped to employ the type that spring even "before the ice was clear in the Baltic, where I proposed to use them, owing to their very light draught of water, in the big plan I've mentioned to you."⁸⁶ Another link between the construction programme and the Baltic were the orders placed for specialised landing craft--the "X" Lighters. Designed to carry

⁸¹ Mackay, p. 467-8.

⁸² *Ibid*, pp. 473-4; *Conway's, 1906-1921*, pp. 38-9.

⁸³ Fisher to Tudor, December 27, 1914, *FGDN* v.3., pp.113-4.

⁸⁴ Churchill, *World Crisis* v.1., pp. 500-1.

⁸⁵ Fisher to Churchill, January 25, and Fisher to Jellicoe, January 29, 1915, *FGDN* v.3., pp. 145, 150; *Conway's, 1906-1921*, pp. 39-40.

⁸⁶ Fisher to Jellicoe, February 12, 1916, *FGDN* v.3., pp. 306-7.

500 troops, Fisher wanted enough of these self-propelled barges to land 50,000 men on a beach at one time. While these vessels could have also been destined for combined operations along the Belgian coast, the initial order for 200 craft in February 1915 corresponded with the sanctioning of the *Courageous* Class, indicating that they too were intended for the Baltic. The “X” Lighters’ rapid production also tended towards Fisher’s original intention to execute the Baltic plan in the summer of 1915.⁸⁷

Definitive proof that the Admiralty’s 1914-1915 building programme was orientated towards a Baltic descent is circumspect due to a lack of substantiative evidence and Fisher’s reluctance to have the War Staff thrash out the details of the plan. Some have suggested this as the reason why it was never implemented.⁸⁸ An argument can also be made that Fisher’s wartime procurement policy did in fact reflect his preparation for a Baltic campaign. The creation of vessel types for specific strategical/operational roles was not a new concept to him, (i.e.) destroyer development in the early 1890’s for a close “observational” blockade on the northern French bases.⁸⁹ In many ways, the 1914-15 construction policy also imitated steps taken in 1906-09 to provide light cruisers as “parent vessels” for destroyer flotillas engaged in inshore operations outlined in the Admiralty’s 1907-1908 War Plans. Like the cruisers, *Scouts*, and larger destroyers developed during his first administration, the products of Fisher’s wartime construction policy were also designed with a potential North Sea/Baltic offensive in mind.⁹⁰ The “Baltic Project” was much more than a “talking point” for the First Sea Lord to counter the impulsive Churchill.

Fisher communicated *The Baltic Project* to the Prime Minister as an appendix in a 25th January paper: “Memorandum by the First Sea Lord on the Position of the

⁸⁷ *FDSF* v.2., pp. 193-4, 196; *Conway’s, 1906-1921*, pp. 101; Undated paper by Fisher (1916?), ADM 116/3454.

⁸⁸ R. Hough, *First Sea Lord: An Authorised Biography of Admiral Lord Fisher*, (London, 1969), p. 333; *FDSF* v.2., p. 196.

⁸⁹ Refer to Chapter 1, above.

⁹⁰ Refer to Chapters 3 and 4 above.

British Fleet and its Policy of Steady Pressure.” By this stage, Asquith was a firm adherent to the Dardanelles proposition. Attributing Fisher’s opposition to the Near Eastern plan solely to the Baltic, he refused to circulate the latter’s memorandum to the War Council.⁹¹ The reasons for this are unclear, but it may have been influenced by Fisher’s offensive mining policy which could have unnecessarily offended the neutrals.⁹² It was Fisher’s failure to express the reasons behind his opposition to the Dardanelles venture at the 28th January War Council meeting that ensured the Baltic project’s supersession.⁹³ Although he championed a Baltic campaign up to his break with Churchill in May 1915, the plan was consumed by the ever deepening commitment against the Turks.

The details of the Dardanelles operations, Fisher’s break with Churchill, and the fallout which toppled them from the Admiralty has been detailed elsewhere.⁹⁴ The Navy’s failure to force the Straits on 18th March 1915 paralleled, however, some of the difficulties a British fleet might have encountered in passing into the Baltic. Apart from minefields and shore batteries, any fleet endeavouring to force its way through the Belts/Sound would have had to contend with swarms of German torpedo-craft. The mine-sweeping difficulties at the Dardanelles could have proved a harbinger for an even greater failure in the Baltic. That point was, ironically, realised by Corbett in December 1914 long before either plan was even officially tabled.⁹⁵ The lack of a proper planning division (established September 1917) to thrash out a northern operational plan and

⁹¹ The memo is reproduced in Churchill, *World Crisis* v.2., pp 151-5; Mackay, pp. 482-6; *FDSF* v.2., pp. 195-6.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁹³ The most comprehensive analysis of the January 28th, 1915 War Council meeting and Fisher’s actions is in Mackay, pp. 485-90.

⁹⁴ *FDSF* v.2., Chapters 9, 10, 11; Corbett & Newbolt, *Naval Operations Volume 2*; Gilbert, *Churchill*, v.3., Chapters 6, 8-10; Mackay, pp. 488-505.

⁹⁵ The March 18, 1915 attempt to force the Dardanelles, the minesweeping and related difficulties, and operational “post-mortems” can be found in: Marder, *FDSF* v.2., pp. 245-50, 259-65; *FDSF* v.4., pp. 191-6; op cit., *From the Dardanelles to Oran*, (London, 1974), pp. 11-32; Churchill, *World Crisis* v.2., Chapters 11, 13; Keyes, *Naval Memoirs, Volume 1*, Chapter 13.

coordinate everything from bombardment to logistics may have repeated the Dardanelles failure on a larger scale in the Baltic.⁹⁶ By October 1914, Fisher's inclination to keep strategic conceptions "locked in the head of the First Sea Lord and nowhere else" was well entrenched. The removal of Churchill and Fisher did not, however, diminish the re-exploration of prewar offensive contingencies.

V.

The post-Dardanelles fallout had little effect on the Admiralty's investigation of potential offensive operations against Germany. British merchant shipping losses in Germany's first unrestricted submarine campaign, February-September 1915, and continued operational losses to U-boats and mines prompted a re-examination of Baltic and Heligoland Bight offensives.⁹⁷ Churchill's successor as First Lord, Arthur Balfour (May 1915-December 1916), sought Jellicoe's advice on a more vigorous naval strategy. Throughout January-February, he queried the C-in-C about utilising old battleships in the Baltic with the Russians against the German fleet and Kiel.⁹⁸ Having, "long arrived at the conclusion that it would be suicidal to divide our main fleet with a view to sending ships into the Baltic", Jellicoe decried a Baltic campaign due to German naval strength and the dangers from mines and submarines near the Belts. At best, he supported feints against Borkum and Sylt using pre-dreadnoughts and monitors as "bait" to draw the High Seas Fleet over British submarines in the Baltic and North Sea.⁹⁹ On 17th February, the War Committee (replaced the War Council in November 1915), re-evaluated Fisher's Baltic project and related prewar North Sea plans. Reiterating Jellicoe's conclusions, the Committee ruled out Baltic operations. North Sea/Baltic advanced bases were also rejected due to troop unavailability and strong German land defences. Proposals reminiscent of Ballard's 1897 RUSI essay and the

⁹⁶ *Naval Staff*, pp. 70-1, NLMD.

⁹⁷ Halpern, pp. 291-300, 309-10; *FDSF* v.2., pp. 367-8.

⁹⁸ Balfour to Jellicoe, January 6 and February 2, 1916, Jellicoe MSS. 48992, Vol. 4.

⁹⁹ Jellicoe to Balfour, January 25 and February 3, 1916, *Ibid*.

NID's 1904-05 plans to block German ports with sunken hulks and/or mines were also dismissed due to a lack of merchant ships to serve as obstructions and the German fleet's presence which negated the maintenance of minefields.¹⁰⁰ Despite this censure, the advanced island and blocking schemes remained considerations well into 1917.

Balfour re-considered Wilson's Heligoland proposals to establish British control in the Bight. On 19th September, 1916, he circulated a paper to the Sea Lords and senior Fleet officers questioning the island's value to Germany and what its possession meant for Britain. Jellicoe repeated conclusions arrived at Loch Ewe two years earlier. Despite its advantages as a forward base Heligoland, "would be to us a great incubus and drag on the fleet, exposing the fleet to great risks with no commensurate advantage". Unless it was entirely self-supporting, the island: "would be a millstone round the neck of the Navy, and an attempt to hold it would lead to heavy losses from mine and submarine." The new First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Henry Jackson (May 1915-November 1916), the other Sea Lords, and Commodores (S), Sydney S. Hall, and (T), Tyrwhitt, concurred with the C-in-C's assessment. Although British control of the island, "would be a thorn in the side of the enemy", it would be difficult to supply and maintain and thus "a very great anxiety to us". The naval war's altered circumstances had even forced Wilson to conclude that, "the balance of advantages and disadvantages is very much against taking possession of it [Heligoland]."¹⁰¹

Unlike Churchill, Balfour's desire for action was tempered by the recommendations of his naval advisors. In October, Balfour repudiated a Baltic offensive because of the heavy losses expected from a push through the heavily mined southern exits of the Belts. It, "would be more costly than the naval attempt on the Dardanelles-and there is no military prize comparable to Constantinople to reward our

¹⁰⁰ Minutes of the February 17th, 1916 meeting of the War Committee, CAB 22/7; Corbett and Newbolt, *Naval Operations* v.3., p.314.

¹⁰¹ Balfour, "Questions on Heligoland", September 16, 1916; Replies to First Lord's "Questions on Heligoland", October 1916, ADM 116/1350., 15 pp.

efforts if we succeeded.”¹⁰² The Admiralty’s strategic priorities remained, however, as convoluted as in the immediate prewar period. Dictated by the submarine threat, it was difficult to delineate between defensive or offensive remedies. Despite rejecting the Heligoland proposal, Jackson soon advocated “Copenhagen” style attacks on German bases to eliminate the depredations of “Submarine Raiders” in early November 1916. Only by the “double edged stroke” of combined operations against German U-boat bases in Belgium, for example, could the threat be overcome.¹⁰³ Dissatisfaction at the Admiralty’s handling of the anti-submarine campaign, however, forced Balfour to remove Jackson and appoint Jellicoe as First Sea Lord in late November 1916.¹⁰⁴ The growing crisis in the naval war would even force even the latter to re-consider proposals he had deprecated since the eve of the war.

Germany’s renewed unrestricted submarine campaign in February 1917, proved the catalyst for a re-examination of discounted prewar plans. By late spring-early summer, remedies to the submarine scourge were trickling into the Admiralty from the Grand Fleet. On 30th May 1917, Captain W. W. Fisher of HMS *St. Vincent*, (made Director of the Naval Staff’s new Anti-Submarine Division in June 1917) forwarded a proposal to Jellicoe detailing the blocking of the Elbe, Weser, Ems, and Jade rivers to halt the egress of German submarines. A modernised version of the NID’s July 1904 plan, Fisher advocated blocking deep water channels in the rivers with sunken hulks, moored and sensitive ground mines, and net obstructions. A small armada of light cruisers, destroyers, monitors, submarines, and trawlers, with air cooperation, would be employed in the operation. The barriers would be established under smokescreens to minimise German defensive fire. Other contingencies included the closing of the Baltic

¹⁰² Balfour’s memorandum, “Report on Recent Naval Affairs”, October 1916, summarised in *FDSF* v.4., p. 241.

¹⁰³ Jackson to Balfour, November 6, 1916, Jackson MSS. X97/014., Box 1., NMM.

¹⁰⁴ Balfour to Jackson, November 21, 1916, *Ibid.*; *FDSF* v.3., pp. 330-7; #14, “Documents relating to Jellicoe’s transfer to the Admiralty as First Sea Lord”, Patterson, *Jellicoe Papers* v.2.; op. cit., *Jellicoe: A Biography*, (London, 1969), pp. 149-53.

exits by the American fleet and Heligoland's capture via poisonous gas.¹⁰⁵ The suggestion to employ "asphyxiating gases" apparently originated within the Board of Invention and Research and Lord Fisher in December 1916.¹⁰⁶ The DOD, Rear-Admiral George P. Hope, deemed the entire plan "defective" as there "was no real force behind it." Unless covered by "the full Naval force of the Allies", which risked destroyers needed in the anti-submarine campaign, Hope surmised that the blocking operations would fail. He did, however, believe that Captain Fisher's scheme deserved "very careful study" as the Admiralty may be obliged to implement blocking operations against the German rivers and the Belgian ports at Zeebrugge and Ostend to halt reduce U-boat depredations.¹⁰⁷

Appointed Minister of Munitions in the coalition Lloyd-George Cabinet, Churchill forwarded renewed North Sea proposals to the Admiralty in late July as a counter to the U-Boats. He again suggested seizing Borkum, Sylt, Heligoland, and creating an anchorage off Horn's Reef to: lure the High Seas Fleet out, block Germany's North Sea estuaries, and seal the Baltic exits.¹⁰⁸ Earlier arguments against these operations were repeated by Jellicoe; the head of the Planning Section, Captain A.D.P. Pound; the DOD, Hope; and Oliver who had become Deputy COS in May. Borkum and Sylt's seizure were complicated by their closeness to the mainland which exposed them to constant bombardment and air attack. Unless the German fleet was eliminated, the same scenario applied to Heligoland which was vulnerable to continual naval interdiction. An aspect of 1908's Plan W.2., Jellicoe ruled out the Horn's Reef

¹⁰⁵ Memorandum/Letter by Captain W.W. Fisher to the First Sea Lord, Sir John Jellicoe, May 30, 1917, ADM 137/2712, Plans Division War Records. Blocking CMB's and Heligoland Bight. Holland Index.

¹⁰⁶ "Attack on Heligoland", (December 1916?) 2 pp., Fisher MSS. FISR 5/22, # 4316, Churchill College.

¹⁰⁷ Remarks on Captain Fisher's scheme by Rear-Admiral George P. W. Hope, DOD, Naval Staff, June 4, 1917, ADM 137/2712.

¹⁰⁸ Mr. Churchill's Scheme and remarks by Captain A. D. P. Pound, Planning Section, August 1917, 22 pp., ADM 137/2712.

anchorage as having “small value” because of its distance from the German estuaries. Blocking Germany’s North Sea bases would only reduce the submarine menace and not abolish it as they would simply use Kiel. Alternately, the Baltic exits could only be closed after the High Seas Fleet’s destruction and/or the establishment of a Kattegat base. Neutral susceptibilities complicated the latter provision while the entire plan was “an operation of great magnitude” requiring the bulk of the Allied naval resources. This was compounded by the Franco-American refusal to commit their battleships to inshore operations but, more importantly, the inability to strip escort craft away from the convoy system. Jellicoe surmised: “if we failed in blocking his ports we should be very much worse off than before.” His remarks were not meant to “veto” Churchill’s proposals but indicated the need to seriously examine blocking operations, “dealing with the menace at its root”, should present anti-submarine methods fail.¹⁰⁹ While riddled with deficiencies, Churchill’s reanimated designs spurred the Admiralty to another consideration of the blocking option.

In late July, Jellicoe ordered the Operations Division’s Planning Section to investigate closing the North Sea and Baltic exits. With an Allied Naval Conference looming, he thought it pertinent that a detailed plan be drawn up: “to consider whether the only real remedy to the S/M [submarine] menace, viz blocking the S/M’s in port, is really feasible, although no doubt very costly.”¹¹⁰ The Section was reconstituted for the task with Jackson (then Admiral President of the War College) appointed as chairman. A complex plan was submitted on 18th August, which elaborated on W. Fisher’s and Churchill’s proposals from May-July. Its objectives involved blocking all exits available to German submarines. The Elbe, Jade, Weser, and Ems would be blocked and the Baltic entrances closed. Assuming that the High Seas Fleet was in the Jade and other

¹⁰⁹ “C.N.S. Naval War Policy”, Comments by the First Sea Lord, DOD, and DCNS on Winston Churchill’s project for operations against Heligoland, Sylt, and Heligoland, July 1917, Jellicoe MSS. 48992., Volume 4., ff. 97-106; *Jellicoe Papers* v.2., pp. 174-9; Admiral of the Fleet Earl Jellicoe of Scapa, *The Submarine Peril*, (London, 1931), pp. 63-6; *FDSF* v.4., pp. 229-30.

¹¹⁰ Orders from the First Sea Lord to Prepare Scheme (entailing blocking/mining operations in German waters and of German ports to contain the egress of submarines), “Shipping situation vis-a-vis the Submarine Menace.”, July 31, 1917, ADM 137/2712.

surface units in the Elbe or Baltic, heavy warships had to be contained before the U-Boats. This would be accomplished in interconnected stages: (1) seizing Heligoland, Wangeroog, and neutralising the Schillinghorn defences to ensure operations in the Jade; (2) blocking the Jade and Weser to isolate German vessels in the Baltic from the main Wilhelmshaven fleet; (3) blocking the Elbe; (4) mining the Ems. The blocking of the estuaries would be accomplished by the sinking of old concrete-filled pre-dreadnoughts and cruisers (43 battleships, 43 cruisers). After closing the rivers, three lines of mines (21,000 mines--43 miles) would be laid between Wangeroog and Heligoland and Heligoland and the Eider River. The last phase of the North Sea operations involved the capture of Borkum and Juist before the mining of the Ems Channel. An attack on Sylt was ruled out as it did not justify the large expedition needed to take the island. Its exits would instead be mined to prevent its use as a submarine base.¹¹¹

The plan's Baltic phase was equally complex. After establishing the North Sea obstructions, five separate mine lines would be laid in the Kattegat-Belts. A sixth line would be laid across the Sound, depending on Danish-Swedish attitudes. Due to the large areas involved and the deep water at the Sound's northern end, mines (7,500 "H" type) were a more effective barrier than block-ships. The entire operation hinged on maintaining: "a superior force to that which the Germans may bring against us." Advanced bases for supporting forces could be established at Kalo, Seirö, and Samsö Bays contingent, however, on Danish permission.¹¹² These Baltic operations were hauntingly similar to Ballard's 1897 plan to seal the Belts and Sound to prevent the egress of Russian cruisers in a naval war against the Dual Alliance.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Report by Admiral Sir Henry Jackson and Operations Division for Scheme of Operations to block North Sea and Baltic exits, August 18. General Appreciation, Part I. And Appendices 1-11., 17 pp. General Appreciation, Part II. "Attacks on Heligoland and Wangeroog. August 1917. Reference NID Plan 18., 11 pp., ADM 137/2712.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, General Appreciation., Part 1.

¹¹³ Refer to Chapter 1, above; Ballard, "The Protection of Commerce During War", *JRUSI*, Volume XLII, April 1898, pp. 393-401.

The Planning Section made no recommendations either for or against their North Sea/Baltic proposals. Jackson was, however, concerned about the risks involved in placing the North Sea obstructions and taking Heligoland/Wangeroog against the heavy German defensive network: “one of the best sheltered spots in Europe for keeping out an unwelcome intruder.”¹¹⁴ The Assistant Director of Plans and co-advocate of the 1912-14 distant blockade strategy, Captain K.G.B. Dewar, concurred with Jackson, viewing the blocking operations and seizure of the islands as “impracticable”. While the operations were not “impossible”, Dewar felt, “I don’t think we have the capacity to carry it out. The Admiralty and Staff are the weak links in the chain.”¹¹⁵ The Naval Staff and Jellicoe, rejected the entire plan for several reasons: (1) Flat-trajectory naval guns could not cover troop landings on Heligoland unless they closed to within range of the island’s howitzers which was not a consideration (especially after the Dardanelles); (2) the Army rejected Wangeroog’s seizure because of its proximity to the mainland; (3) block-ships could not be accurately placed under heavy fire from the German defences; (4) channels could be dredged around the open end of the block lines; (5) the Americans, French, and Italians were unwilling to provide the old warships needed for the operation; (6) the Baltic exits, “would still remain available for enemy use, as they could not be blocked without violating Danish and Swedish neutrality.”¹¹⁶

Responding to Jellicoe’s request that the Grand Fleet also consider blocking operations, its C-in-C, Admiral Sir David Beatty, had his Second-in-Command, Admiral Sir Charles Madden, (1st Battle Squadron) investigate.¹¹⁷ Madden’s Operation “ZZ” also entailed closing the Baltic entrances and a close blockade on the Bight, minus Heligoland’s and Wangeroog’s seizure as advanced bases. Consisting of two stages, the plan required the assistance of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway and involved

¹¹⁴ Report by Admiral Sir Henry Jackson....”, August 18, 1917., Introduction, ADM 137/2712.

¹¹⁵ Dewar to Richmond, September 12, 1917, Dewar MSS. DEW/33., NMM.

¹¹⁶ Jellicoe, *Submarine Peril*, p. 68; *FDSF* v.4., pp. 234-5.

¹¹⁷ Jellicoe to Beatty, July 31, 1917, *Jellicoe Papers* v.2., p 191.

establishing advanced bases and air stations in their territories. The North Sea operations required Danish and Dutch cooperation since clearing a belt through existing minefields in the Bight and the construction of a 153-mile barrage (22,000 mines), necessitated bases on their territories. A Jutland airbase would help achieve air superiority over the Kattegat and North Sea debouches. The plan's first stage involved confining the High Seas Fleet and German submarines to their bases before the implementation of the blocking scenarios. Since there was "no great difficulty" in blocking the Belts, Sound, and Kattegat, the Baltic segment included laying temporary minefields at the southern end of the Belts and Sound to contain the German fleet and submarines. The Belts would then be blocked by booms/minefields at their narrowest points between: the mainland and Fyen, Fyen and Zealand, and lines east-west of Samsö Island. Five booms, reinforced with mines and block-ships, would be laid in the actual Belts themselves with two booms laid to protect the anchorages at Kalo Vig and Seirö Bay which would serve as advanced bases. Britain would lay 72 miles (12,000 mines) of nets/booms, with the Danes and Swedes expected to lay and maintain 90 miles (5,600 mines) of obstructions. A secondary advanced base at Christiansand in Norway, similar to Fisher's 1907 proposal, was projected for the combined Franco-American fleet that would cover the Kattegat operations.

Unlike the Baltic stage, the Bight's closure was "a very difficult operation." Hulks would be sunk in the main channels of the Ems, Weser, Jade, and Elbe, but serious problems included: accurately placing 200 block-ships in the estuaries, Heligoland's presence, the High Seas Fleet's proximity, and British main bases being located 200-300 miles from the scene of operations. Similar constraints affected laying minefields off the river entrances. Madden, accordingly, ruled out the block-ship option. A mine-net barrage would instead be laid outside Heligoland, beginning north of Sylt and ending west of the Ems. Existing minefields near the barrage and outside it would be swept to safeguard Grand Fleet movements and vessels maintaining the barrage. These sweeping operations were, however, compromised by the expected presence of up to fifty enemy submarines. Serious losses were anticipated even before the barrage's

construction. To alleviate the submarine threat, German bases at Zeebrugge and Ostend would be covered by Commodore (T) and Dover forces.¹¹⁸ Madden's proposal, like other wartime offensive schemes, repeated aspects of pre-war planning such as Ottley's 1905 mine blockade provisions and Ballard's 1912-13 proposals. His North Sea barrage mirrored Wilson's 1910-11 plans for a close investment of the Bight, itself a variation of War Plan W.3.'s projected "watch" on the German rivers via a cruiser line running between Horn's Reef and Terschelling.¹¹⁹ Operation "ZZ" again demonstrated the difficulties attending any Baltic operations in view of Scandinavian neutrality. Provisions to utilise Christiansand and other locales in Denmark and Sweden as advanced bases were, as noted, an integral part of the Royal Navy's strategic deliberations during the 1905-08 Scandinavian "status quo" debates. Christiansand's seizure as a British base in the event of a German invasion of Norway had been considered by the War Staff as late as October 1916.¹²⁰

By 1917, operational realities and expediency conflicted with diplomatic considerations, especially as the Navy felt constrained by the Government's ambivalent attitude to the northern neutrals. Despite the Admiralty's desire to protect Norway's vital iron-ore shipments and its mercantile fleet from possible German actions, the Cabinet vetoed any moves that would destroy the status quo and alienate other neutrals. The Government's policy towards Holland and Norway apparently nullified a potential offensive strategy aimed at strengthening trade defences and bringing out the German Fleet.¹²¹

Not only was Operation "ZZ", "one of great magnitude", its success depended

¹¹⁸ Operation "ZZ"., Proposals of Admiral, Second in Command, Grand Fleet. HMS *Revenge*, 7 August, 1917., 27 pp. 2 charts., ADM 116/1936. (HSA 138), Secret Packs of the Commander-in-Chief Grand Fleet, 1914-1918, Volume LVI. Pack 0022. Operations. Section K. Strategical and Tactical Matters. Nos. 1-10.

¹¹⁹ Refer to Chapters 4 and 6 above.

¹²⁰ *FDSF* v.4., pp. 251-2.

¹²¹ *FDSF* v. 4., pp. 246-54; Jellicoe to Beatty, with enclosure "Neutral Powers", December 30, 1916, *Jellicoe Papers* v.2., pp. 130-3.

on Denmark and Holland's negligible cooperation and "at least a benevolent neutrality on the part of Norway and Sweden." Madden therefore viewed the blockade of Germany as more of an "International and Military question" than a naval one. Since Germany could overturn the closure of the Baltic/North Sea by an invasion of Denmark and Holland, Madden stressed that the plan was redundant unless the alliance was widened and Holland and Denmark's defence assured. New developments in mines, hydrophones, aircraft, etc., may modify conditions to allow for a "close and continuous blockade" without the encumbrances of nets, booms, advanced bases, and neutral cooperation. He concluded that the submarine problem's "successful solution" involved technological improvements rather than an endeavour to lay and maintain over 200 miles of nets and mines.¹²² His conclusions were ironic given the Admiralty's hesitant approval and reluctant cooperation in the American brokered Northern Barrage from the Orkneys to Norway after March 1918.¹²³ Passing Madden's proposal to Jellicoe, Beatty concurred in his Second-in-Command's assessments.¹²⁴ There is no evidence that Jellicoe forwarded Madden's or the Planning Division's August studies to the Foreign Office or the Cabinet for their consideration of neutral cooperation in the blocking schemes. It would seem that, given his unenthusiastic approach to Baltic/North Sea offensive campaigns, Jellicoe was content to let the Cabinet's position on the northern neutrals prevail.

The 4 -5th September Allied Naval Conference resolved the offensive blocking issue. Called at the behest of the American naval representatives, the conference considered joint offensive measures against the submarine menace. Jellicoe presented the two alternatives then being considered: the Planning Division's August proposal and the American sponsored Northern Barrage. As explained to the Allied representatives,

¹²² From the Admiral Commanding, First Battle Squadron to the C-in-C, Grand Fleet, "The Blockade of Germany", August 7, 1917., No. 020/15., ADM 116/1936.

¹²³ Halpern, pp. 438-41.

¹²⁴ To the First Sea Lord, from the C-in-C Grand Fleet, August 13, 1917, (H.F. 0020/796), ADM 116/1936.

the blocking operations against the U-Boats and German fleet required 83 old warships to be sunk in the exits to the Bight. While the Allies could provide these vessels, the expenditure of cruisers would disrupt the convoy system then in the initial stage of development. Unprepared to sacrifice convoy integrity, the delegates dropped the blocking provision as a viable scenario. The second option was accepted despite Jellicoe's concerns that the 100,000 mines needed to close the Orkneys-Norway gap would be unavailable for some time even with increased American production. After Jellicoe's 22nd September approach to the US Navy Department, the mines were duly ordered with work commencing on the Northern Barrage in March 1918.¹²⁵ By mid-October 1917, however, Russia's rapidly deteriorating situation forced another reconsideration of "The Baltic Project".

The Admiralty's attention was soon diverted to the unstable conditions in Russia following the March Revolution and the status of the Russian Baltic Fleet. Through the War Cabinet, Jellicoe urged the Russians to intensify their mining efforts in the eastern Baltic while Beatty despatched British battle cruisers to the western Jutland Bank in late April to keep the German Fleet out of the Baltic. The Admiralty's fears were realised when the Germans launched "Operation Albion" in October: a combined attack against Russian forces in the Gulf of Riga. Supported by two-thirds of the High Seas Fleet, German forces occupied Oesel, Moon, and Dagö Islands bringing them into striking distance of the Russian naval base at Tallin (Reval) and the capital at Petrograd. Requests from the Kerensky government for assistance prompted Jellicoe to instruct the new Director of Planning (September 1917), Rear-Admiral Roger Keyes, to study a push into the Baltic, *a` la* Churchill's and Fisher's 1914-15 proposals.¹²⁶

Keyes's report was not favourable. Without the High Seas Fleet's destruction and the preliminary blocking of the Elbe, any semi-permanent occupation of the Baltic was impracticable. To secure the North Sea/Baltic entrances two separate fleets were

¹²⁵ *Report of a Naval Conference of Powers United Against Germany, September 4th and 5th, 1917*, Jellicoe MSS., 49034., ff. 1-20; Patterson, *Jellicoe*, pp. 194-6.

¹²⁶ *FDSF v.4.*, pp. 241-4; Halpern, pp. 213-22.

necessary, each equivalent to the German Fleet in size. A raid into the Baltic was not “impossible” but was a “first magnitude” operation involving long, vulnerable communications lines. Aside from employing a large military expedition to take and hold Fyen, considerable mine sweeping was needed to clear the Belts. Moreover, any British fleet operating in the Belts would probably be subjected to “severe” and continual German air attack. Another difficulty was that to cover its heavy units and minesweeping, the Navy would have to withdraw its entire destroyer force from anti-submarine work. Even if a British fleet made it through the Belts, it would have to contend with Fehmarn’s heavy defences and a net barrage east of the island. Keyes concluded that the risks were so considerable, “that it should not be attempted unless the advantages to be gained are worth the losses to be incurred.” ¹²⁷

Jellicoe accepted Keyes’s arguments and the possibility for another Baltic campaign passed into obscurity.¹²⁸ The only aid provided to the Russians occurred in late October when a light force, supported by the 2nd Battle Squadron and battle cruisers, made a small “demonstration” in the Kattegat. The Baltic issue was soon settled by the Bolshevik takeover in early November 1917.¹²⁹ Some, such as the head of the British Naval Mission to Russia, Admiral Victor Stanley, and Oliver (now Deputy Chief Naval Staff) supported the arguments by Keyes and Jellicoe that a Baltic naval force would have its retreat cut off by the High Seas Fleet. Others, including the British public and press, were unimpressed with the Admiralty’s decision to abandon the Russians and the Baltic theatre.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Cover Minute and Memorandum by the Director of Plans, Rear-Admiral Keyes, “Operations in the Baltic”, October 21, 23, 1917, ADM 137/2706, Plans Division War Records. (HSB 184) Suggested Baltic Sea Operations, 1917.

¹²⁸ Jellicoe, *Submarine Peril*, pp. 68-9.

¹²⁹ *FDSF* v.4., pp. 244-5.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*; Buchanan to Foreign Office, October 17-18, 1917; Minute by Oliver, DCNS, October 18, 1917; Memorandum by Naval Staff (Operations Division), October 20, 1917; Admiralty Memorandum for the War Cabinet, “Naval Situation in the Baltic”, November 22, 1917, ADM 137/1249, ff. 399, 421-30, 434-6, 438, 443-4.

Prominent amongst the latter group was Lord Fisher. By this stage a bitter critic of the outgoing Jellicoe (replaced by Admiral Sir Rosslyn E. Weymss as First Sea Lord on 26th December) and the Admiralty's handling of the naval war, Fisher complained about the missed opportunities presented by Germany's "Albion" campaign. Writing to the former Civil Lord of the Admiralty, George Lambert, he lamented over a lack of "VISION" and the Admiralty's failure to concentrate in the "decisive theatre", (i.e.) the Baltic. The German move into the Gulf of Riga: "was momentarily a magnificent and sure opportunity of destroying the Kiel Canal and wrecking therein the denuded German Fleet (which would have taken refuge therein), and our landing half a million men in Danish Schleswig-Holstein....., seizing the North Sea entrance and marching on Kiel!" Commenting that his "plan", the Baltic project, was "perfected, precise, and certainly peculiar!", Fisher concluded, somewhat poignantly: "But it wanted the 'planner' to execute it!"¹³¹ That last utterance, perhaps best encapsulated the main reason why a British campaign aimed at Germany's vitals in the Baltic never materialised during the First World War.

It was ironic that the postscript to the Royal Navy's wartime offensive planning did not occur in the Heligoland Bight nor the confined waters of the Belts and Sound, but against two Belgian ports. Proposals to eliminate Germany's Flanders Flotilla operating from the Zeebrugge-Ostend-Bruges triangle were rife throughout 1916-17. The Dover Patrol, commanded by Bacon, fought an often desperate battle to contain German attacks on the Dover Barrage and U-Boat movement through the Channel to the Allied shipping lanes off the Western Approaches.¹³² The crisis in the summer of 1917 and the inability to attack the submarine pens at Bruges influenced Jellicoe's call for a land offensive in Flanders, resulting in the futile and horrendously costly Third

¹³¹ Fisher to Lambert, December 29, 1917, *FGDN* v.3., pp. 497-8.

¹³² Admiral Sir R. Bacon, *The Dover Patrol, 1915-1917, 2 Volumes*, (London, 1919), see Volume I, Chapters 8-10 for Bacon's plans for attacks on Zeebrugge; H. Newbolt, *Naval Operations* v.5., pp. 36-42, 45-8, 118-9, 241-3; A. Temple Patterson, *Tyrwhitt of the Harwich Force*, (London, 1973), pp. 181-3; Keyes, *Naval Memoirs* v.2, pp. 127-34; Jellicoe, *Submarine Peril*, pp. 83-7.

Ypres (Passchendaele) campaign, July-October 1917.¹³³ It had not been the only option. for Bacon had proposed an amphibious assault near Westende on the Belgian coast, *vis-a-vis* proposals first explored in 1914, in conjunction with the Army's operations. Utilising large pontoons pushed by monitors, Bacon thought a successful landing would turn the German flank. The failure of the Army to advance far enough, however, squashed the project.¹³⁴

The overall situation was not aided by an fratricidal squabble between Bacon and Keyes, who rejected the former's plans as unfeasible in the Channel Barrage Committee. This contributed to Jellicoe's dismissal, although ostensibly the loss of two Scandinavian convoys in October and December, and a disappointing clash between British and German light forces in the Bight on 17th November, were the reasons for his replacement by Weymss. Keyes, a Weymss partisan, soon replaced Bacon, a strong Jellicoe supporter, as commander of the Dover Patrol.¹³⁵ While the convoy system was slowly proving its effectiveness by early 1918, Keyes became obsessed with the blocking of Zeebrugge and Ostend to counter the strain German destroyer attacks had placed on the Dover Barrage. With the transport of American troops across the Atlantic slated for that summer, there was an urgent need to "seal in" as many German submarines as possible.¹³⁶ Keyes's final plan, "Operation Z.O.", was submitted to the Admiralty on 24th February 1918.¹³⁷ In essence, it continued the North Sea blocking proposals previously examined throughout 1914-17.

The planning, preparations, and implementation of the 22nd -23rd April

¹³³ Richmond Journal entry, July 1, 1919, *Portrait*, p. 353.

¹³⁴ Bacon, *Dover Patrol* v.1, pp. 223-59; *FDSF* v.4., pp. 201-3.

¹³⁵ Patterson, *Jellicoe*, pp. 199-205; Corbett and Newbolt, *Naval Operations* v.5., pp. 178-83, 204; *FDSF* v.4., pp. 315-22, 347-8; Keyes, *Naval Memoirs* v.2., pp. 118-26, 135-47; Bacon, *Dover Patrol* v.2., pp. 401-13; P. Halpern (ed), *The Keyes Papers, Volume 1, 1914-1918*, (London, 1972), pp. 416-39.

¹³⁶ M. Gilbert, *The First World War*, (London, 1995), p. 417.

¹³⁷ The plans for Operation "Z.O." and Remarks by the Sea Lords are in: Halpern (ed), *Keyes Papers* v.1., pp. 460-78. Also refer to: Keyes, *Naval Memoirs* v.2., Chapters 17, 19.

Zeebrugge- Ostend raids, and their aftermath have been recounted elsewhere.¹³⁸ At best, the operations were only a temporary success. Operationally, they did not halt the continued egress of the Flanders U-Boats. The Ostend raid failed to block the harbour entrance, while at Zeebrugge the Germans merely dredged around the block ship obstructions.¹³⁹ And yet, the raid was significant as a practical demonstration of what may have been possible offensively. Zeebrugge represented, albeit on a minor scale, aspects of prewar plans which hitherto had only existed as paper theories or easily dismissed studies. In conception, the raid shared the same underlying premise as Bayly's 1913-15 proposals to attack the Kiel Canal's western locks, aspects of the 1907-08 War Plans (Plans C-D, W.3., Parts 1-2), Wilson's 1905-07 plans, Fisher's 1904-05 "Copenhagen" schemes, and the NID's original July 1904 Elbe plan—all entailing a decisive strike at the enemy's strategically vulnerable areas. By 1917-18, however, strategic exigencies had shifted priorities away from "sealing" Germany's North Sea ports as a precursor to a Baltic campaign to the more immediate problem of containing the submarine threat. Fisher's lament in December 1917 that there was a lack of "vision" and that "it wanted the 'planner' to execute it!", provides a clue to why, with the exceptions of the Dardanelles and Zeebrugge/Ostend, there was a general aversion to dangerous, but potentially decisive operations, throughout the war.

At its core, Operation Z.O. mirrored conditions that would have arisen in any attempt to establish an advanced base off the German/Dutch North Sea littoral, or in the Baltic—a mainstay in Admiralty/NID war planning from Ballard's 1897 RUSI essay onwards, if not before. Ironically, while Jellicoe and other senior fleet officers may have decried the dangerous excesses of the "Baltic Project", Churchill's North Sea schemes, and other combined/inshore offensive plans, the need to overcome the realities imposed by the mine and submarine prolonged and authenticated the very planning trend they

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapters 17-26; Corbett and Newbolt, *Naval Operations* v.5., pp. 252-75; *FDSF* v.5., pp. 45-66.

¹³⁹ Corbett and Newbolt, *Naval Operations* v.5., pp. 274-5; Halpern, *Naval History*, p. 416.

dismissed as impracticable. The question persists, if the prewar plans championed during the war were outdated, why then were they continually re-examined? As proven throughout 1905-09, the original plans developed against Germany took careful account of strategic, diplomatic, technological, and operational realities. Furthermore, the legitimacy of these assumptions was continually verified and tested in manoeuvres, other exercises, and proven by the Admiralty's procurement policies right into the immediate prewar period. The very fact that these designs were consistently promoted and re-evaluated throughout 1914-1918 again confirms that there was an underlying validity to the offensive planning trend begun at the height of the Dual Alliance rivalry.

CONCLUSION

The High Seas Fleet's anti-climactic surrender in November 1918 offset the search for offensive solutions to the North Sea stalemate and the submarine menace.¹ For some, the termination of hostilities had revealed congenital defects in the Admiralty's strategic system, especially poor preparation at the war's outset. Richmond cited weaknesses in the Navy's prewar educational and strategic policy for continuing: "the Doctrine of No Doctrine; so many officers so many ideas is the present Service rule. Hence, lack of preparation of war, as no one had clear & agreed upon views as to how war would be conducted."² The scuttling of the German Fleet at Scapa Flow on 21st June 1919, was further proof that: "The wheel has come full circle: the Navy has ended as it began with unpreparedness."³ Postwar reflections by those unaffiliated with the Admiralty's planning were equally negative. Stephen King-Hall, a Grand Fleet lieutenant in 1914, compared the Navy to a "prehistoric Brontosaurus" at the beginning of the war: "a very big body with a very small brain."⁴ Such analogies of the Admiralty's prewar and wartime strategies ignore the reality that a carefully developed offensive policy was in place by 1912: the product of a planning trend initiated after 1888, constructed throughout the 1890's and adapted to meet the case of a war against Germany by the NID, John Fisher, and the Admiralty beginning in 1902.

Postwar critiques resurfaced in major studies of late Victorian-Edwardian naval policy, fostering the impression that the Navy's pre-1914 and wartime strategic policy was non-progressive, with war planning haphazard at best.⁵ Fisher, for one, was chided as a "child" in strategic matters, a questionable assertion given the legitimate plans

¹ *FDSF* v.5., pp. 190-4.

² (Enclosure) Richmond to Haldane, February 15, 1919, *Portrait*, pp. 335-6.

³ Richmond to C. Bellairs, June 23, 1919, *Ibid.*, pp. 349-50.

⁴ S. King-Hall, *My Naval Life, 1906-1923*, (London, 1952), p. 23.

⁵ Refer to Introduction, footnote 2.

created under his direction throughout 1905-1909 and the talented individuals associated with their creation, such as Ballard.⁶ This interpretation and other non-linear examinations of the Navy's strategic endeavours in the late-Victorian/Edwardian period focussed on specific questions and missed the impact of the NID and inter-related causal factors key to the entire planning process such as: the evolution of a historical movement dedicated to improving the Service's strategic thought and education, manoeuvres, procurement, and Scandinavian/European power politics. The Admiralty's strategic transformation beginning with the NID's creation in 1887 to the end of the First World War was informed and innovative, continually evaluating the strategic, technological, and diplomatic realities involved in the formulation of plans designed to maintain Britain's traditional dominance at sea.

Two developments were crucial for the establishment of planning after 1888: the NID's evolution into the Service's *de facto* staff and its link to the academic study of British naval history forged by Laughton, Philip Colomb, Bridge, and others in the 1890's. The first provided the necessary formal structure in which strategic questions could be tackled and thrashed out through manoeuvres, war games, intelligence reports, and other exercises. The second formed the vital conceptual/theoretical framework for the creation of a definitive strategy based on the application of Britain's naval past to contemporary conundrums caused by advances in naval technology and, by 1905, new uncertainties in the European political arena. This symbiotic relationship fostered the emergence of a distinctive offensive strategy entailing a move from the "close" blockade to the observational "watch" on an enemy's main bases/ports, combined with decisive strikes against an adversary's sensitive points throughout the 1890's. As a response to the *Jeune Ecole* and the threat posed by French torpedo flotillas, this dual strategy was driven by two vital considerations: the deterrent factor, and should that fail, an offensive campaign to quickly terminate any conflict. Its goals were threefold: removing the threat posed by an enemy's main fleet by forcing it into a decisive fleet

⁶ Lieut-Commander P.K. Kemp, "War Studies in the Royal Navy", *JRUSI*, May 1966, p. 151.

action; eliminating a *guerre de course* against Britain's overseas trade and allowing reciprocal attacks on an enemy's mercantile commerce; facilitating combined operations against an enemy's vulnerable areas, (i.e.) colonial possessions, bases. Variations on these seventeenth-early nineteenth century themes were re-examined and re-introduced to conform to technological change through the collaboration of the NID, the academic study of British naval history, and intellectual forums such as the NRS and RUSI. This trend towards "observational" blockade and inshore operations along an enemy's littoral via a system of advanced bases was confirmed as the Admiralty's *prima facie* strategy in Ballard's 1897 RUSI essay, which also substantiated his inheritance of intellectual processes established in the late 1880's-early 1890's by Laughton, Colomb, and Bridge and maintained by DNI's affiliated with the historical revival such as Custance and Battenberg.

The Admiralty's prewar planning was established not only by manoeuvres, exercises, intelligence reports, and other studies conducted after 1888, it was consistently legitimised and refined by these factors until August 1914. Organisational and fiscal restrictions on the early NID impeded its ability to collate and process intelligence into contingencies. Linked to the historical themes identified by Laughton, Colomb, Bridge et al., exercises became the only outlet for the department to consider the strategic/technological issues associated with the Anglo-French naval rivalry and the creation of what were, in effect, early war plans. Thus beginning in 1888, manoeuvres emulated the Admiralty's potential strategy against France. While the 1888 Manoeuvres revealed weaknesses in the "sealing-up" or "close" blockade concept, they enabled the evolution of that strategy into the "observational" blockade. Exercises conducted throughout the 1890's furthered the inter-relationship between the Admiralty's developing strategy and procurement (i.e. torpedo gunboats, *Scouts*, and early destroyers) and validated that the Navy's anti-torpedo-boat measures could sustain a "watch" on an enemy's bases. Studies evaluating the advanced base concept in the Mediterranean, indicated that the offensive forward base theme was a viable component in the NID/Admiralty's strategic formulations. By 1898, NID reports and Ballard's 1897

RUSI paper had confirmed the fusion of the observational blockade and the advanced base concept as the Admiralty's primary strategy.

The 1900-1904 manoeuvres and NID reports also legitimised the Admiralty's "observational" blockade strategy. Exercises, such as the September 1902 "Argostoli" evolution, demonstrated that the old "close/sealing-up" blockade circa 1888-89 was defunct and not the newer strategy developed as a derivative of Colomb's "masking" category. The adoption of the observational blockade against France and Germany was confirmed by the August 1904 Torpedo Craft Manoeuvres. Evaluating the NID's July 1904 plan for a "watch" on the French northern bases, Germany's North Sea coast, the Skagerrak, and the blocking of the Elbe, these manoeuvres clarified that British fleets could conduct such scenarios and defend themselves against enemy flotillas operating near their bases. The August exercises also reinforced the link between strategy and procurement by serving as a "test bed" to evaluate the inshore capabilities of the new *River* Class destroyers. The manoeuvres verified the Admiralty's policy of providing the requisite vessels for its offensive strategy while familiarising British flotillas with likely operations in a potential war against Britain's newest threat.

Strategic studies, intelligence reports, and war games conducted at the War College throughout 1902-06 provided the NID with valuable analysis to expand the observational blockade contingency against Germany. The War Division's evaluation of German naval manoeuvres confirmed that ancillary offensive strikes against the North Sea estuaries, the Canal, and Kiel could be successful. By late 1907, manoeuvres/exercises were simulating the first "official" war plans against Germany. Channel Fleet Tactical Exercises in June-July tested aspects of War Plan C/C1 for "watches" on Germany's western littoral and the Skaw to prevent High Seas Fleet sorties from its North Sea egresses. October Channel/Home Fleet manoeuvres mirrored Plan C's inshore "watch" on the Elbe and a distant observational blockade of Kiel from near the Skaw. Manoeuvres and Home and Channel Fleet reports in 1908-09 verified that aspects of the supplemental "W" series war plans were serious considerations. The July 1908 manoeuvres conformed to W.1. and W.2.'s proposals for a more distant

observational blockade of Germany's North Sea and Baltic exits. War Plan W.1.-W.3.'s recommendations for inshore "watches" were examined in Home Fleet flotilla exercises in October 1908 which simulated British efforts to curtail German flotilla movement between the Weser, Jade, and Elbe. The emphasis on W.1.-W.3.'s projected operations along Germany's North Sea littoral continued into 1909 as evidenced by studies on flotilla fuel consumption rates and secret hydrographic tests off Jutland's western coast. By the end of 1909, manoeuvres, related studies, procurement, and war planning had all defined the direction of the Admiralty's strategic policy against Germany.

Manoeuvres assumed a greater significance in the post-Fisher Admiralty. Combined Home/Atlantic Fleet exercises in April-May 1910 simulated both an East coast "flotilla defence" scenario⁷ and watches off Germany's western estuaries, indicating that the observational blockade, (i.e. War Plans W.1.-W.2.) remained at the core of Wilson's vague strategic policy. The War Staff's attempt to replace Wilson's contingencies with the untenable "Intermediate" blockade in early 1912 was rejected when the July-August Home Fleet Manoeuvres revealed weaknesses in the system's long, vulnerable cordons across the middle of the North Sea. The exercise confirmed Ballard and Kenneth Dewar's promotion of the 1907 distant blockade plan as the only viable solution to the War Staff's haphazard design. On the eve of the Navy's greatest test since the Napoleonic Wars, manoeuvres and planning had again verified the Admiralty's primary strategy.

Admiralty procurement was a valuable adjunct to its strategic policy from 1888 into the First World War. The torpedo-gunboat's introduction in the 1880's to counter the French torpedo-boat threat indicated the Admiralty's commitment to a traditional blockade strategy against the *Jeune Ecole*. As the "close" blockade became a projected "masking" of French bases after 1888, the gunboat's inshore value was vindicated in the 1890-94 manoeuvres. The torpedo-boat destroyer's introduction in 1893-94 was a more blatant example of strategy-driven procurement initiated by the NID (Bridge) and

⁷ Lambert, "Admiral Sir John Fisher and the Concept of Flotilla Defence", pp. 639-60; *Naval Revolution*.

the Admiralty Controller (Fisher). A derivative of the torpedo-gunboat for fleet defence and inshore flotilla operations off Cherbourg and Brest, the 27 and 30 *Knot* destroyers were the *matériel* embodiment of the Admiralty's offensive strategy against France. Manoeuvres conducted after the destroyer's introduction proved valuable trials for the new type and revealed that they could protect a British fleet off an enemy's bases. By 1898, the Admiralty's flotilla-orientated construction and the advanced base concept had improved the overall effectiveness of potential British offensive operations off French ports.

Successful "watches" on an enemy's bases/coast were enhanced by the evolution of the torpedo-gunboat into the *Scout* Class cruisers and the early destroyers into the *River* Class after 1902. Proven in early service, the *Scout's* seaworthiness and all-weather capability ensured their primary role as "parent" support vessels to British flotillas operating offensively off French northern bases. The same demands for endurance and sea handling were behind the 27-30 *knotters'* transformation into the first modern destroyer type, the *River* Class. With a larger displacement and higher freeboard, the new destroyers were superior to their predecessors when performing inshore duties off an enemy's bases. This was proven during the August 1904 Torpedo Craft Manoeuvres, the same exercise which confirmed that observational and offensive operations off an enemy's coast were the Admiralty's primary strategy against France and Germany. By Fisher's appointment as Service chief in October 1904, procurement had established the *matériel* basis for the Admiralty's offensive policy and laid the groundwork for new vessel types to complement an expansion of that strategy.

Fisher's 1906-09 light cruiser programme affirmed the observational blockade strategy and procurement's continuing role in meeting the Navy's strategic requirements. Debate over a faster replacement for *Scouts*, torpedo-gunboats, and unarmoured cruisers as "parent ships" for inshore flotillas led to a unanimous Admiralty Board recommendation that work on a new type commence in 1907. Coinciding with the Ballard Committee war plans and the ongoing Scandinavian "status quo" dilemma in early 1907, both the DNI (Otley) and Fisher verified that the new cruiser type's

duties entailed observational and flotilla operations along Germany's North Sea coast and in the Baltic. This drive to mate flotillas of more seaworthy destroyers with improved "parent" vessels for inshore/observational operations indicated that the central tenets behind the 1907 War Plans were accepted doctrine even before their completion or the supplementary 1908 "W" series. By 1909, the Board was creating a sizeable "mosquito fleet"⁸ to pursue its North Sea/Baltic plans as detailed by the Ballard Committee.

The final link between procurement and the Admiralty's strategic programme, though not conclusive, was the wartime construction programme associated with Fisher's "Baltic Project". Not originally intended for combined Baltic operations, the construction of monitors, shallow draught battle cruisers, and landing barges became increasingly connected to Fisher's renewed "Copenhagen" -like conceptions by early 1915. Proven by his role as Controller and the destroyer's introduction in 1893-94, the adoption of new vessel types to meet the Admiralty's strategic requirements was not an unfamiliar concept to Fisher. The inter-relationship between procurement and strategy is a strong argument that offensive planning, as developed between the 1890's and the First World War, was consistently viewed by the Admiralty as applicable in the event of war.

Another factor influencing the Edwardian Navy's strategic policy were crises in the European balance of power such as the Scandinavian neutrality /"status-quo" dilemma. Apart from Fashoda in 1898, pre-Entente Anglo-French disputes and naval "scares" were never really serious enough to precipitate a major conflict. By 1904, however, Wilhelmine Germany's aggressive foreign and naval policies were another matter. The High Seas Fleet's growth after 1902⁹, overtures to Russia during the Russo-Japanese War, and Wilhelm II's scheming to make the Baltic a *mare clausum*, clarified that Germany was Britain's most likely future foe and re-defined the Admiralty's

⁸ DNI, C.L. Ottley, "The Strategic Aspects of Our Building Program, 1907.", January 7, 1907, Richmond MSS, RIC/4/2/a3, NMM.

⁹ Refer to Appendix II.

strategic preparations. Repeating strategic tenets developed against the Dual Alliance. Fisher's threats to destroy the German fleet at Kiel, assault the Canal, and invade Schleswig-Holstein in 1904-05 were not mere conjecture but were a deterrent to Germany's antagonistic foreign policy. Not designed as preventative strike scenarios, the NID's preliminary plans against Germany still gave the First Sea Lord the very offensive strategy needed to make his policy all the more effective. By June 1905, the Holstein-Bülow attempt to fracture the Entente prompted another re-assessment of the Admiralty's strategic options, resulting in the Ottley-Wilson plans for a North Sea/Baltic blockade or offensive strikes against the Elbe, Kiel, and Schleswig-Holstein. The Moroccan crisis also gave Fisher the pretext for a demonstration of the Admiralty's strategic intentions with the Channel Fleet's Baltic cruise a reminder that the plans behind the threats were a distinct reality. If deterrence and diplomacy failed, the means were in place for a decisive strike against Germany's vitals.

Norwegian independence and Russo-German machinations to exclude Britain from the Baltic (i.e. Bjorko) brought the question of strategic access into that sea to the forefront by mid-1905. The Admiralty's offensive contingencies against Germany were, in fact, potential hostages to any Scandinavian neutrality guarantee involving the Baltic entrances. When Norway clarified that its proposed neutrality clause included Denmark and Sweden in December 1906, Fisher took concrete steps to redefine the Navy's strategy: the Ballard Committee's 1907 War Plans. A significant departure from earlier plans, the distant blockade scenario, Plan A/A1, amalgamated the observational blockade theme, Ballard's 1897 RUSI essay, and Ottley's economic recommendations. Plan A's distant blockade of the North Sea averted the possibility that the Royal Navy may be excluded from the Baltic by a general neutrality arrangement. Not only did the plan correspond with the debate over Norway and neutrality, it was an innovative alternative should diplomacy fail to preserve unchecked British access to the Baltic. Plans C and D were likewise products of the Scandinavian neutrality dilemma: C, a British naval offensive against Germany's Baltic ports; D, a response to an invasion of Denmark via amphibious/naval strikes against Germany's communications. Should

either German action or a neutrality agreement close the Belts/Sound, D opened the Baltic to C's strike on Germany's eastern ports—a consummation of strategic themes dating back to the 1890's.

Foreign Office appreciations of the Scandinavian neutrality issue confirmed the 1907 War Plans' legitimacy. Renewed rumours of a Danish-German compact to close the Belts prompted Fisher to clearly outline the Admiralty's strategic intentions to the Norwegians in February 1907. If Germany occupied Denmark, Britain would seize Christiansand to control the Skagerrak. His impetuosity belied the importance of Norway and the Belts to the Navy's primary contingencies: Plan A's northern blockade cordon and C's assault on Germany's Baltic trade/bases. Russia's proposed abrogation of the Åland Islands servitude and German overtures to extend the "status quo" to the North Sea in 1908 increased the Baltic entrances' questionable status. These issues confirmed the providence of the Ballard Committee designs and laid the groundwork for another extension of their basic axioms. The signing of separate North Sea/Baltic agreements in April 1908 maintained the "status quo" in the Baltic but did not assuage Fisher's concerns over the Belts and Sound. Accordingly, he and Slade implemented more war plans as supplements to the 1907 contingencies--the "W" series. Stimulated by the fallout from the "status quo" agreements, War Plans W.1. and W.2. were variations on earlier plans for a "distant" Heligoland Bight blockade with British flotillas off Germany's North Sea estuaries and "watches" on the Skagerrak/Kattegat supported by advanced bases off the Jutland Peninsula. Similar to Plan A in intent, these quasi-distant blockade variants provided an alternative to the possibility that the Baltic would be closed by either a German invasion of Denmark or a Scandinavian compact. War Plan W.3. was a direct response to the Casablanca Crisis and Austria's annexation of Bosnia-Hercegovina in the Fall-Summer of 1908. Part Two of W.3. repeated Plans C-D by stressing elaborate combined operations to gain control of the Belts and a blockade of Germany's eastern ports, after the establishment of a "watch" on the North Sea egresses. Like their predecessors, the "W" series reflected the importance of the Admiralty's primary strategy against Germany and the impact of European power

politics, not on the basic tenets of that strategy, but its continual maturation (i.e. the distant blockade).

Technological change and disruptions in the European balance of power profoundly impacted the Admiralty's war planning after 1888. Apart from these external factors, however, it was officers associated with the NID and the scholarly study of Britain's naval past that maintained, modified, and evolved the Navy's strategic policy to meet the demands of an increasingly hostile world by 1902-04. The process was neither smooth nor easy given fiscal and organisational restrictions on the NID's ability to function as a true planning staff. And yet, it did, creating a viable offensive strategy against the Dual Alliance in the 1890's and then applying it for a potential war with Germany between 1902 and 1908. The chief reason for this successful transformation was the talent within the NID itself. The department's demise as *de facto* "staff" after the Fisher-Beresford fracas was a retrograde step away from an executive staff and the continued evolution of the Admiralty's war plans. Between 1909 and 1914, the Navy's strategic organisation suffered additional setbacks caused by: Fisher's autocracy; the Army's "continental" strategy; Cabinet indecisiveness; Wilson's continuation of the "warlord" dictum; the creation of a new, but ineffective staff system; and Churchill's amateurish meddling. The integrity and legitimacy of the Admiralty's more tenable plans however survived, kept intact and re-established by capable officers associated with the NID's early war planning against Germany—the successors to the contextual historical truisms rediscovered by Laughton, Philip Colomb, Bridge, and Custance in the 1890's and early 1900's.

The nature of the Admiralty's prewar planning was characterised by the two individuals most responsible for its strategic development into the First World War: Ballard, the pre-imminent intellectual strategist; and Fisher, the arch reformer, innovator, and organiser. Out of all the Admiralty's prewar planners: Battenberg, Hankey, Ottley, Wilson, Corbett, Richmond, and Kenneth Dewar, Ballard was by far the most influential. Inheriting the strategic maxims developed from Laughton and Colomb's historical work, he epitomised the dynamic and legitimate planning trend he

helped establish. His 1897 Gold Medal RUSI essay codified the observational blockade concept behind nearly all the Admiralty's plans into the First World War. Working with Custance and Hankey in the NID throughout 1902-05, Ballard adapted this strategy for use against Germany as the precursor to an offensive strike in the Baltic—giving Fisher the actual operational plans to back up his “Copenhagen” deterrence policy in 1904-05.

Ballard's collaboration with Hankey and Ottley in 1906-07, resulted in the economically based and strategically viable Plans A and C which circumvented the Baltic's closure in a war with Germany. These plans retained the traditional dictum of applying direct pressure on the enemy: the first through the “passive” distant North Sea blockade, based on the historical precedent of British operations against the Dutch in the seventeenth century¹⁰; the second, an evolution of the trend begun in the late nineteenth century, the NID's early operational plans for Germany, and the Fisher-Wilson “Copenhagen” strikes on Germany's Baltic bases/commercial ports should A/A1 not attain its desired ends. As DOD in 1912, Ballard rehabilitated Plan A and, with Dewar's assistance, reconfirmed it as the Admiralty's primary strategy in the coming conflict. With its preservation in mind, he and other officers in the War Staff and Grand Fleet deflected Churchill's attempts to resurrect the more untenable offensive designs from the Admiralty's prewar planning. Although these aspects of the dual strategy persisted into the war they were again tempered, as Fisher knew all too well, by the reasoned approach to operational planning established by officers such as Ballard in the pre-1909 NID. Surprisingly, the latter's influence has been largely overlooked as has the true nature of the strategic course he helped implement and maintain.

Intellectually divorced from the Service's historical-strategic revival in the 1880's-90's, Fisher nonetheless understood the underlying principles behind the axioms rejuvenated by Laughton, Colomb, Ballard, and the NID. As First Sea Lord, he became not only a successful practitioner of those offensive concepts via his “Copenhagen”-deterrent philosophy but realised the crucial link between the observational blockade-

¹⁰ Ballard, “Remarks on War Plans.”, May 3, 1909, ADM 1/8997, p. 4; Chapter Three above.

decisive strike strategy and flotilla based procurement as evidenced by the integration of light cruisers and larger destroyers into his reform policies. He remained a strong champion of this strategy until internal opposition and external pressures to his policies forced him to retrench the First Sea Lord's prerogative over strategic matters; a move which retarded the other vital component to the Navy's intellectual progression –the creation of an effective naval staff system. Yet, despite Wilson's and Churchill's unprogressive tenures as "war lords", the offensive concepts from the late 1890's held on and matured, due to their timeless viability and the re-establishment of the planning continuum with Ballard's appointment as DOD in 1912. A testament to Ballard's talents, his Admiralty reappointment was attributable to Fisher's influence and the need to restore the planning trend developed in the NID's formative years and during his first period as First Sea Lord. The maintenance of this link was evident in the war's early years, long after the NID and Ballard had departed the scene.

Fisher's "Baltic Project" typified his adoption of the historically-based trend established in the late nineteenth century. His earlier thoughts on deterrence and a decisive "Copenhagen-type" strike, were encapsulated in the "Baltic Project" but reflected the same cautious qualifications behind the planning conducted between 1906-08. Aware of the advantages and disadvantages, Fisher knew that offensive amphibious-naval strikes against Pomerania, Kiel, the Canal, and German Baltic trade (e.g. Swedish iron-ore), should only be implemented if the passive pressure of the distant blockade failed to appreciably effect Germany. Adopting an extensive mine blockade of the Heligoland Bight, as proposed by Ottley in 1905 and Ballard in 1912-13, as the safest expedient for the essential "sealing" of Germany's North Sea egresses, Fisher's entire plan was only an option if accepted after cautious study and was not a first strike contingency. As such, it retained the same meticulous and informed approach developed in Admiralty planning dating back to the Ballard Committee and before. While supporting the same strategic axioms as Churchill, Fisher was aware of the original intent of the prewar planners, the war plans' liabilities, and their applicability to actual wartime conditions. Despite King-Hall's "small brain" analogy, the accomplishments

of Ballard, Fisher, and others associated with the Service's strategic development are final proof that for thirty years the Royal Navy's planning was legitimate, progressive, innovative, and constantly attuned to the efficient projection of sea power to defend Britain's interests.

APPENDIX I.¹

Naval Intelligence Department

Director of Naval Intelligence (DNI)

Assistant Directors of Naval Intelligence (ADNI)

From 1887 to 1902, there were two ADNI's. With the expansion of the department in 1902, and the inclusion of the Trade Division, the number of ADNI's was increased to four. Each ADNI was the head of a division. In 1905, a fifth ADNI was added to deal with Coastal Defences.

<u>Mobilisation Division</u>	<u>War Division</u>	<u>Foreign Division</u>	<u>Trade Division</u> (added 1902, abolished 1909.)
-Mobilisation arrangements.	-War Orders for Fleet C-in-C's.	-Naval Policy and Strategy of all foreign countries.	-Questions relating to Defence of British Trade in war.
-Peace manoeuvres	-General questions of strategical policy (including war plans when directed by First Sea Lord and DNI).	-Contraband of war.	-Statistics relating to Ocean Commerce and Trade Routes.
-Auxiliary requirements of Home ports for war.	-Consideration of plans for expeditions.	-Questions of International Law.	
-Control of railway traffic in time of war.	-Preparations on and Reports for British Manoeuvres and Tactical Exercises.	-Notation and Reports on Matériel, Movement, Mobilisation, Manoeuvres, Estimates, Personnel, and Mercantile Marine of foreign powers.	<u>Coastal Defences Division</u> (added in 1905.)
-Retired Officer Lists and War Appointments.	Distribution of Intelligence.	Mobilisation, Manoeuvres, Estimates, Personnel, and Mercantile Marine of foreign powers.	
-Armed Merchant Cruisers (personnel).	-Submarine cables.	-Correspondence with Naval Attachés.	-took over duties of Foreign Division associated with the notation and reports on the coastal and port defences of foreign powers.
	-All questions related to the Fleet Coaling Service.	-Naval administration, coast defences, government and private ship yards, arsenals, factories, naval ordnance, and communications of foreign powers.	
	-Questions related to Indian and Colonial defences.		
	-Wireless Telegraphy		

¹ Naval Staff Monograph (Historical), *The Naval Staff of the Admiralty. Its Work and Development*. London: (Admiralty) Naval Staff, Training, and Staff Duties Division, September 1929. pp. 38-46, Admiralty Library, Ministry of Defence, BR 1875; ADM 231/45, Naval Intelligence Department Report., Volume 45., No. 789., Naval Intelligence Department. "Distribution of Work-March 1905."

APPENDIX II.¹

Growth of the High Seas Fleet, 1 January 1900–4 August 1914

* Based on dates completed and decommissioned, stricken, lost, etc., except torpedo-craft and submarines which are based on launch dates.

	<u>1900</u>	<u>1905</u>	<u>1908</u>	<u>1912</u>	<u>1914</u>
Battleships (Pre-dreadnoughts)	6	17	24	22	22
Dreadnought Battleships	—	—	—	9	13
Battle Cruisers	—	—	—	3	4
Heavy Cruisers (Armoured)	6	9	13	14	14
Light Cruisers	26	34	32	37	38
Torpedo-craft (Destroyers, Torpedo-boats, and “Division” boats (i.e) Flotilla Leaders)	92	124	155	208	219
Submarines	—	—	2	20	33

¹ Compiled from: R. Gardiner (ed) *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships, 1860-1905*, (London, 1979), pp. 240-65; op cit, *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships, 1906-1921*, (London, 1985), pp. 134-89.

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- ADM53 Admiralty, and Ministry of Defence, Navy Department: Ship's Logs.
- ADM 116 Record Office: Cases.
- ADM 137 Historical Section: Records Used for Official History, First World War.
- ADM 144 Channel Squadron and Fleet: Correspondence, 1867-1911.
- ADM 145 Channel and Atlantic Fleet: Correspondence, 1902-1910.
- ADM 231 Foreign Intelligence Committee and Naval Intelligence Department: Naval Intelligence reports, 1887-1910.
- MT 23 Admiralty: Transport Department: Correspondence and Papers.

Cabinet Records (CAB)

- CAB2 Committee of Imperial Defence and Standing Defence Sub-committee: Minutes.
- CAB5 Committee of Imperial Defence: Colonial Defence Memoranda ("C" Series).
- CAB16 Committee of Imperial Defence, Ad Hoc Sub-Committees: Minutes, Memoranda, and Reports.
- CAB17 Committee of Imperial Defence: Miscellaneous Correspondence and Memoranda.
- CAB18 Committee of Imperial Defence: Miscellaneous Reports and Papers.
- CAB45 Committee of Imperial Defence, Historical Branch and Cabinet office, Historical Section: Official War Histories.

Foreign Office (HD)

- HD3 Foreign Office: Permanent Under-Secretary's Department: Correspondence and Papers.

War Office (WO)

- WO106 Directorate of Military Operations and Military Intelligence, and predecessors: Correspondence.

ARCHIVAL SOURCES cont.

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National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

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Admiral George Alexander Ballard

Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge

Sir Julian S. Corbett

Vice-Admiral Kenneth G.B. Dewar

Sir William Graham Greene

Vice-Admiral Sir William Henderson

Admiral Sir Geoffrey T. P. Hornby

Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry B. Jackson

Admiral Sir William A. H. Kelly

Admiral of the Fleet Sir William H. May

Admiral of the Fleet Sir Charles Edward Madden

Admiral Sir Archibald Berkley Milne

Admiral of the Fleet Sir Gerald U. Noel

Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry F. Oliver

Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond

Admiral Edmond W. Slade (microfilm)

Sir James Richard Thursfield

Churchill College Archives Centre, Cambridge.

Personal Papers:

Admiral Sir Frederic C. Dreyer

Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Arbuthnot Fisher, Lord Fisher of Kilverstone

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